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SEPTEMBER

VOL.
28

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PART 154.

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1881.

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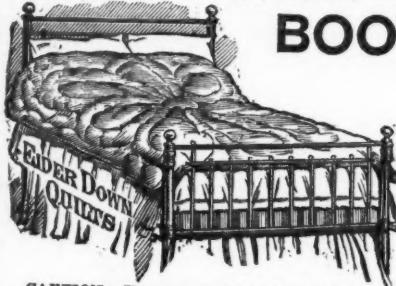
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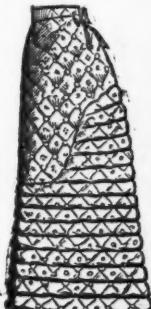
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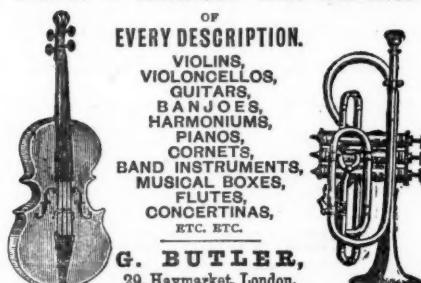
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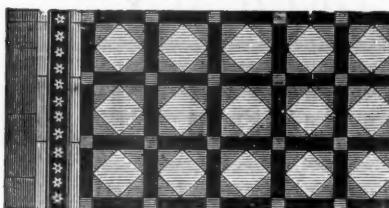
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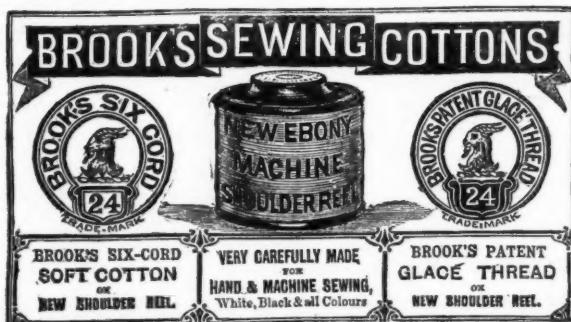
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A Weekly Journal
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CHARLES DICKENS

NO. 666. NEW SERIES.

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 3, 1881.

PRICE TWOPENCE.

JACK DOYLE'S DAUGHTER.

BY R. E. FRANCILLON.

PART II. PHIGEBE'S FATHERS.

CHAPTER V. THE FATE OF PHILOSOPHY.

At the end of the very few minutes which carry one from Holborn to the Temple, Doyle (to call him Jack any longer is henceforth out of the question) had discovered the business chambers of Mr. Urquhart in Elm Court, and had knocked at the door. But, to his disappointment, he learned that Mr. Urquhart was not at chambers that day; that he was going out of town to attend some arbitration in the North, but that he would be found at home up to three in the afternoon by anybody who wished to see him urgently. Now what can possibly be more urgent than the welcome of an old friend who has just come home from India after an absence of many years? So Doyle, feeling in himself an increasingly urgent need of the long-forgotten luxury of the touch of the hand of a friend, and having nothing more profitable to do, made a short calculation of the time it would take him to get from the Temple to Fonthill Gardens, Hyde Park, and stopped the first omnibus that would take him in that direction. Not even the claims and desires of old friendship seemed more urgent than the duty of saving so unprofitable an investment as a cab-fare.

It seemed odd to him that so distinguished a member of the brotherhood of the close fist, to which Urquhart, unlike the converted archdeacon, had belonged from the beginning, should have a house as well as his chambers.

Urquhart had been the man, even in the good old times, to dispense, not only

with cheap comforts—they all, even Charley Bassett, did that—but with such much more essential things as extravagant luxuries. It seemed even odder when Fonthill Gardens (which he had some difficulty in finding, seeing that Hyde Park meant a remote corner of Paddington) turned out to be one of those obtrusively new No Thoroughfares, which look entirely given over to the very height or depth of respectable domesticity. He was utterly unfamiliar with this aspect of semi-suburban London, and, under the influence of the universal expectation that everything else must stand still, while we ourselves move on from change to change, half wondered whether Mr. Urquhart, of the Temple and Fonthill Gardens, could possibly be the same as the ancient philosopher of Gray's Inn.

A barrel-organ—the only familiar sight or sound in the place—suddenly broke out into an imperfect and disjointed version of Cari Luoghi, vi Ravviso. Jack Doyle, of Bohemia, had had an ear for tunes; Mr. Doyle, from Bengal, had a memory for them. And this particular stop of the crazy organ struck him as a very bad joke indeed. He did not throw the grinder a penny as he knocked at Mr. Urquhart's door. For the sake of the badness of the joke, the old Jack Doyle would have thrown him two, if he had them. But times were changed.

They were changed, indeed. The door of Number Eighteen was thrown open by a man-servant in livery.

"Does Mr. Urquhart live here?" asked Doyle. "Is he at home?"

"Mrs. Urquhart is at home," said the footman.

Mrs. Urquhart! Then the last possible

change had come ; the experimental philosopher had committed himself to the only experiment which he had held too irrevocable to be made.

Doyle smiled sadly, and sighed grimly. This, then, accounted for the house in Fonthill Gardens, and the footman.

" Mr. Urquhart is out of town," said the latter. " He is not expected back for some days."

" I will see Mrs. Urquhart," said Doyle, giving his card. " I must see the woman who was too much for his philosophy," thought he. But he felt, " I must know something of my old friends. I must find out if anything is left that isn't changed."

The house, he noticed as he went upstairs into the drawing-room, was expensively and even ambitiously furnished, and yet felt wanting in that first duty of every house towards all who enter its door—the sense of hospitality. Nobody can guess how, or why, or whence it comes ; few consciously note its absence ; but nothing on earth is felt more quickly or keenly, whether in relation to a palace or a hovel. He entered the drawing-room in anything but the humour for making a first call on a strange lady. He was disappointed at not having found Urquhart, and at having found his friend's life so altered. He was anything but a lady's-man, and was already repenting of the impulse of curiosity which had led him into his present situation. A piece of furniture out of place, or a symptom of litter, would have proved a connecting link between the old times and the new. But there was nothing of the kind.

" When Mrs. Urquhart asks me to stay here," he thought to himself, " I think I'll say—no."

He had waited full ten minutes when Mrs. Urquhart came into the room. Of course, she was not what he had expected to see ; as little like a subject for psychological experiments as can well be imagined. She was tall, with a great many more angles than curves ; not ill-featured, but with no signs, in her middle age, of having been married for her beauty. Doyle's eyes, indifferent to the details of any woman's looks, passed over her length of nose, bad complexion, and too pronounced redness of hair, but they did not pass over a sour expression that one does not look for in a presumably happy wife and mother.

" The experiment hasn't the look of having turned out well," thought he.

But then, he had always, on principle, looked in marriage for the wrong things.

" Mr. Doyle ?" asked Mrs. Urquhart, not at all ungraciously, but still with a little more of the stiff doubtfulness which, however prudent towards a stranger, is inconsistent with the hope of an early thaw. " I am sorry to say Mr. Urquhart is from home, but if it is on business—"

" I'm sorry for that. I must introduce myself, then. I am an old friend of Urquhart ; I came back from India only yesterday, and he is the first man in London I've called on. I didn't know there was a Mrs. Urquhart till I knocked at the door. Is it too late to congratulate him on—on—such a change ?"

Mrs. Urquhart did not seem to be impressed by seeing for the first time an old friend of her husband's bachelor days.

" I've no doubt Mr. Urquhart will be very sorry when he hears you've called," she said ; " but he is so busy, and I really don't know when he'll be home."

What Doyle, professing contempt, if not downright dislike for the sex, had expected from a strange woman, he could hardly have told ; but he had certainly not expected the chilling silence that Mrs. Urquhart allowed to follow her precisely-measured phrases. It was almost as much as if she had said, in so many words : " I take no interest in my husband's bachelor friends, and I don't want to know them, and I don't want him to have anything more to do with them." But a man's bachelor friends are notoriously slow to read such signs, and Doyle only felt the chill without catching the tolerably obvious cause. And, at any rate, he could hardly take up his hat and leave the room without making some show of talk for at least the formal quarter of an hour. So much manners, at least, he had learned in Bengal, if, indeed, they were not a relic of some otherwise long-forgotten existence previous to his knowledge of Urquhart, Bassett, Esdale, and Ronaine. For he must have come from somewhere ; no man was ever born a Jack Doyle.

" Urquhart seems to have been carrying everything before him since we lost sight of one another," said he. " I hear him talked of for the Bench, and I see that he ought to be the happiest man in the world."

Jack Doyle had never been famous for compliments to man or woman, but he was rewarded for this by what might pass for a wintry smile.

" I suppose you've often heard of those

rough old times when he was eating his way through the Middle Temple. They were rough days; but—well, nobody is ever sorry for having known them. Urquhart and I must make a pilgrimage to the old places, and see how we feel in them now—if they're not changed too."

"Yes, Mr. Doyle," said Mrs. Urquhart, with a sharp little emphasis, "things do change, and a good thing too."

"H'm—that depends. However, Urquhart's all right, of course? In health I mean? Of course he always used to keep his head cool. I think I was the only man he could never manage to see under the table, but I daresay he could do that now. In India, Mrs. Urquhart, one gets out of training, you see."

"Pardon me," said Mrs. Urquhart, "if I do not quite understand what you mean."

"Ah, am I telling tales out of school? Then you must pardon me. Urquhart was always our good boy."

"I am quite sure," said the lady, "that Mr. Urquhart never did anything that he would not wish me to know."

"Oh, of course. Well, anyhow, here he is, a great lawyer, and a married man, and I don't know what besides—I can't stand more of this," thought he, by way of filling up the fresh spell of silence. "I see how it is; Urquhart has been trying the experiment of marrying a woman with money, and for money, and for nothing else, I should say. So—well, there's an end of him.—I'm afraid, Mrs. Urquhart, I must be going now. But I mustn't forget to ask after our daughter, though I'm afraid I must plead guilty to having forgotten half her names. I hope she has not quite turned out the prodigy that some of us meant her to be?"

"Our daughter," Mr. Doyle? I said Mr. Urquhart tells me everything, of course. But he can hardly be expected to remember every joke that he ever heard made. Of course I'm very sorry if you must go, but if you must—"

"I mean the child that we named Jane Burden. I remember my own share in her christening, though I'm vague about the rest. Let me see; she was to be a Psyche to Urquhart, I believe, to represent an unformed soul—Poor fellow!" he thought to himself again, "fancy being tied to a woman who can't understand one word without the help of twenty! I hope she was worth marrying; but if she were worth the Bank of England, and only cost sixpence, she'd be sixpence too dear."

He thought the lady suddenly looked exceedingly grave and strange. She drew herself up stiffly, glanced at the bell-handle, and then looked him full in the face, as she said, in a tone as clear, and as sharp, and as cold as the edge of an icicle:

"I cannot possibly be expected to know who you are, except that your card tells me your name is Doyle, and that you profess to have known Mr. Urquhart when—when he did not know me. Why anybody should have come all the way from India to insult me to my own face, I really do not know. So I will tell you at once that you will find it no use—no use at all. I know everything, Mr. Doyle."

"Is the woman crazy?" thought he.

"Yes, to insult me to my very face," she went on, without a change of tone. "Perhaps—though you mayn't think it—I know more of you than you suppose. I have heard of you, Mr. Doyle, though, of course, I did not care to say so when you called. Indeed, I did not identify you at first. There are a good many people named Doyle; but I know now, and I am glad I, and not Mr. Urquhart, was at home. I need not tell you of his weakness—how foolishly ready he is to throw away money upon everybody who has ever known him well enough to bow to him. I am a very different sort of person, Mr. Doyle."

"Mad as a March hare!" was the only thought that could come to him. "The woman who can accuse Urquhart of throwing away a single sixpence must be ripe for Bedlam. Poor fellow!" he added, more than half aloud.

"Understand, once for all," said she, "that I don't know whether that—that child is named Jane, or Sukey, or anything else, and that I don't care. If you want to profit by any trumped-up story of my husband's past life, I can only say you have come to the wrong person. When I discovered—never mind how—that Mr. Urquhart was privately paying money to some washerwoman or other for the maintenance of a child, you may be sure I was sensible enough to ask him plainly what he meant by such a thing. He was weak enough to tell me some impossible story of a nursery-maid and a foundling, which, I need not say, I did not believe. He had to own to the truth at last, for understand that my property is settled on myself, and that I may do with it just what I please—income and all. He had to own that the child was not his—for, of course, if it had been, I could not have forgiven him—

but that he was charitably helping to keep the deserted infant of some disreputable acquaintance. No wonder he had tried to keep me in the dark about such a foolish piece of folly ! And he had to confess at last that the name of that child's father was—Doyle. I won't repeat the things I made him tell me about that man. I won't suppose that you are that man, though you have the same name. But, if you think I have allowed Mr. Urquhart to continue aiding and abetting the immoral conduct of other people, all I can tell you is, that the child may be dead for anything I and Mr. Urquhart know. And the best thing, too—poor, miserable, deserted, neglected little thing !

She rose and moved towards the bell.

Doyle rose also. Mrs. Urquhart certainly did not seem in the least afraid of him, and he gave her no cause. His slight approach to her was heavy and slow, and though his voice deepened, it was certainly not with anger. She was not likely to notice how the bronze of his face deepened also.

"I forgot that, being a woman, you must needs have a woman's heart," said he. "As to Urquhart—well, I suppose that married men are bound to get into corners now and then, and must get out as best they can. . . . And what's the use of having an absent friend if one can't use his shoulders ? Make yourself easy, Mrs. Urquhart. You say you don't like to tell me what—Mr. Urquhart said of Jack Doyle. I'll tell you, and you shall tell me if I'm wrong. He called me a shiftless, drunken, disreputable sot, living on brandy that other people were fools enough to pay for—an animal, or beast, rather, wallowing in the dregs of other people's vices—a man whom he was ashamed of having known, half blackguard, half fool—"

"He never called you a fool, Mr. Doyle," said she politely.

Never did quarrel come off with less show of anger on either side.

"Then I may take it he did call me all the rest—and every word of it was true; and as he did not add fool, I do. And now listen to me. I will drag no man's name but my own through the mire, since a woman and a wife, and maybe a mother, thinks it mire to be found out in helping a helpless baby not to starve. Don't be afraid. I'm not angry with your husband for speaking of me as he found me. I won't trouble his domestic happiness by reminding him that he once upon a time—

before he knew you—knew a blackguard named Jack Doyle. I'll only find out who else has broken the bond that I have kept, and that was to hold six men together against the world, wherever we might be. And then—"

"Yes, Mr. Doyle ?"

"Then I shall think better of women, because I shall have to think worse of men. I have been a believer in my own sex, though not in yours. And so, good-morning. You need not even tell Mr. Urquhart I have called, unless you please."

"Then—excuse my anxiety—I may understand that the child is yours ?"

"It seems to be nobody else's, anyhow," said he, with the nearest approach to heat he had shown.

He could not, before he left the house, tell Mrs. Urquhart, because he had never yet told himself the story of how he had become changed. But, as he strode away in no particular direction from Fonthill Gardens, and thought of how Urquhart had thrown over so slight and cheap a trust to save himself from the suspicions of a jealous woman, he began to suspect Bassett's silence to his son concerning so innocent a story, and to be angry with himself for quite another sort of folly. Had that bond in Gray's Inn Square been a mere farce to fill up an idle hour ? He had never even pretended to care a straw about the fate of the child ; and he could not look back upon his first struggle to fulfil his share of the bond without horror. It was not for the child's, but, for his more than half-drunken word's sake that he had forced himself, against the hopeless lethargy of mind and body which had become second nature to him, to earn the first instalment of five pounds to be paid into Mrs. Nelson's hands. He remembered still how Charley Bassett had stared when he roughly refused the latter's offer to undertake his share of the burden, saying, only in less decent language, "No ; when five wise men get tricked by one woman, big or little, five fools must pay." He did not remember clearly the way in which he had, somehow or other, ground out that first five pounds. The memory was hopelessly obscured by the big drink which had followed an extraordinary spell of desperate sobriety. But another five pounds had to be got in another quarter ; and so, to the sincere though unconfessed relief of all who knew him, he turned over on his side and rolled out of his London garret into the office of some newspaper in India, where, it was

fondly hoped, he might speedily be buried under the influence of brandy without pawnee. "Poor Jack," was his spoken epitaph: "He was a good fellow, but—" And at "but" all that could be said of him aloud came to an end. He seemed to have exhausted himself in the feat of working for, and earning, five pounds, without drinking it in sixpences by the way. Jack drunk had been getting bad enough, but Jack sober was not to be borne. He showed, in this condition, too many signs of what the ultra-Bohemian comes to be, when, as sometimes happens, he grows old. So, as it seemed, he went out of sight and under water, and was missed for nine not unpleasant days. His friends lamented him warmly; but how many mourners would be overjoyed if a friend whom they buried yesterday were to walk in at the door to-day? He would, at any rate, have the bad taste to put everything out, and to throw discredit on his own funeral. Nobody (and he knew it) cared twopence about the end of Jack Doyle.

How it was that the chance nickname of Archdeacon had followed him out to India, the few, if any there be, who understand such things must explain. It seems likely enough that a nickname, once given, becomes part of a man, from which he cannot be freed without being flayed. No man with a nickname would be surprised to hear himself greeted by it on a first introduction to some strange mandarin in the heart of China. But it no longer bore the old meaning; indeed, it came to have no discoverable meaning at all. That first fight for five pounds had left its traces upon him; and, little by little, as time dragged on, the same recurring need became a sort of Fetish—a third nature which gained ground upon the second. Nor could he, after a while, make five pounds without making a good many more. And, unknown to himself, that invisible bond was closely hugged as the only sort of chain that bound him to another living soul.

"And it was a farce," thought he, "if I am the only one to whom it has been more than a straw. There is Esdaile, and there is Ronaine; but where are they? That young fellow had never heard their names. I may be wronging Bassett—and I know nothing of the others; and so there's only one thing for it. And that is, here goes."

Honestly, he would have given a good deal of money, say five shillings, to avoid seeing the girl who had forced him out of Bohemia against his will, and changed him

into whatever he was now. But his heart had been growing sore as well as hungry. His business in England was to see his old friends, half thinking to find them as of old, as the one makeshift open to him for coming home. And he had found one a baronet, and another a henpecked lawyer: what would the others prove?

"As poor as Job, and much less married, I hope with all my heart," he thought as he went, at last, towards Gray's Inn. His quarterly remittance had bound him to know that Mr. Nelson's official address was still with Messrs. Mark and Simple. That, at least, had never changed. And, considering all the circumstances, the continuance of the Admiral in the same situation for so many years was considerably more remarkable than the change of an amateur Bohemian into a county magnate, of a Jack Doyle into a reputed miser, or even of a Philosopher into the husband of a jealous shrew. For, after all, all these things have been known before, from the days of Socrates downwards.

Doyle had not been in Gray's Inn Square since the night when Marion Eve Psyche Zenobia Dulcibella Jane received her names. And he thought it strange that the hand of a man who had long forsaken brandy should tremble a little, as it knocked on that same old door of green baize.

"TO NOBLEMEN, GENTLEMEN, NURSERYMEN, AND OTHERS."

DOWN a country lane, leading out of a country town, there is to be a sale by auction of living plants and shrubs; and, turning out of the country town, down the country lane, in expectation of a goodly gathering of noblemen and gentlemen, and of quite a rush of nurserymen (they being the persons to whom the sale-bills, or catalogues, first appeal), there comes a comic and very easy thought. How excellent that, after the noblemen and gentlemen, that after the nurserymen, the auctioneer should have remembered to insert in the same catalogues a comprehensive Others! For there are no noblemen and gentlemen to be seen, whether on the stroll down the lane or on the stroll up it; it is not clear either that there is as much as one nurseryman. Strike out Others, therefore, and the catalogues need never have been put into type; the attractive "posters," pasted here and there in the country town, need never have repeated the bill's most salient points in larger

lettering. It is very curious, even if it is not very disappointing. Here is the lane, it is the hour for the sale, and what else is there? There are a few folks on foot, some keeping to the narrow gravel side, some straying off into the road; and being as safe from peril in the last as on the first, since there is no traffic to flurry them, and they can take their own pace and their own position. There is a slouching smock-frocked man amongst them, with dull eyes and heavy gait; there is a brace of school-lads; there is a farm-girl, dreaming over a basket with a double lid; there is a peach-cheeked and pointed-chinned old grandame in snug bonnet tied round her ruddy visage like so much length of tube. Farther on, here is a man in greasy drab; here is another in much-worn tweed; here is a third, at this instant, emerging from a cottage-door. This last is in dark olive velveteen, with dark skin, with dark hair, with dark scar straight from each side of his mouth to ear and ear, left by a just-healed machinery accident, it appears in a minute or two, when he is accosted and asked how he feels. The man who accosts him is a russet-coloured man, with his russet trousers tied up under the knee to shorten them, with his russet coat-collar set off by the near twisting of a scarlet neckcloth, with his russet complexion set off by flaming scarlet whiskers and scarlet hair; and though he says, alluding to the plant-sale, "Yes, I've come for a hour or so, to look on, just to pass away the day," that very fact is a confession that there is not much promise in him of profit, and the same may be said of everyone of the rest. Yet, out of these Others, a few make a turn into a small nursery-garden on the right of the road; these few tread down the leading path of it, noting critically the growth and condition of the nursery-gardener's property about to be sold; and it is as well to take things as they are, and to quietly follow.

And now that these are here, and that a couple of nurserymen proper, in fair black broadcloth and true business aspect, appear from somewhere, it must be said to be a scene that has very pleasant features. The lots, being living plants and shrubs, and being the tools and implements that form a nurseryman's stock-in-trade, are in no ware-room, necessarily, are in no hard-stacked packages. They are *laurustinus*, in good solid satisfactory rows; they are *aucuba japonicas*, and *euonymuses*, and *wellingtonias*; they are rosemarys in

comely tufts, and lavenders, and pampas grasses speared up high, and apple-trees, currant-bushes, gooseberries; they are yews, upright and slim; they are Portugal laurels, hollies, brooms, privets; and they are all growing, blowing out in the air, alive and thriving under the bright sky. To mark out some distinction, helping the grouping in the catalogues, there is a wisp of rush tied round a tree-trunk here and there; there are light sticks stuck into the ground, with tickets inserted in their split heads, on which the numbers may be readily seen. There are neat little rows of box-edging, too, not arranged in the form of edging, but in long straight lines for prompt up-rooting, whenever it is wanted for planting in other gardens elsewhere; up and down which box-lines the nurserymen and the Others stride at uncomfortable extension, with the mind, evidently, to count the length in yards. There are decaying sunflowers in odd waste corners, hanging their tawny withered faces; there are snails snugly feeding on browning seed-pods; there are black pea-shucks, and blacker bean-shucks strewing the broken ground; there are trodden mustard-plants, recognisable by their yellow-flowering heads. On the paths, and in the emptied mould, there are pipe ends, and potsherds, and bits of crockery, yellow and blue; and hollow raspberry canes; and tufts of groundsel; and soiled dahlia blooms; and crushed nut-husks; and a great many tufts of grass.

What a friendly affair the whole little matter is, now that the auctioneer has come, and the two nurserymen and the Others stand still! The auctioneer is tall, well built, well aged, having plenty of good life still in him, along with plenty of good experience. He has no desk or pulpit (technically) to rap his brisk "Going" and "Gone" taps on; but he has his little ivory mallet, the other end of it a pencil, and he brings this down upon his folded catalogue as he stands there among monkey-plants, and *thujas*, and *pinus arboreas*, with all the auctioneering conventionalities the circumstances allow. Cheerily as he does everything from first to last, he will not waste time by a long address, he says. He points out that the conditions of sale are the usual conditions of sale, to be read by all he sees around with their catalogues—(there are only three, as an absolute fact). The plants, he declares, show their good qualities themselves, being a credit to the grower, a

credit to the ground. Every convenience shall be accorded by him to buyers, for if it is not their pleasure to take their lots away at once, they may let them stay a month, or longer; with the one stipulation that they are owned and cleared during the current quarter, so as not to raise the question of further rent. As he speaks, his pleasant voice is echoed in the clear air, and against the sloping sides of the little valley. As he speaks, also, there is so much brisk business in him and good-humoured intention, helped by so much firmness and solemnity in the solid assistant he has brought with him, who indicates the extent of a lot of plants by a flourish of a walking-stick all over them, and a deep plunge of the end of the stick afterwards in the furrowed earth; that he is even able to pretend there is brisk business in the unpromisingness that surrounds him, as his first three or four lots are offered and "gone" at melancholy prices, only ventured upon as "first," but that had to be accepted in default of competition.

"Better and better!" he cries spiritedly, at the end of each. "Though they're given away, as I may call it; we always do give the first lots away; it's policy. But now look at these next; they are more worth your notice. That is policy again. We always arrange to have things better as we go on. So, kindly give me a bidding. Let us get along."

The biddings do not come, however. The getting along is not done. The two nurserymen, having bought the box-edging and another item or two of everyday commercial demand and requirement (the whole, after all, not amounting to a sovereign), look straight off at the green trees that frame the valley when Cupressus Lawsonianas are "offered," when gooseberry-bushes succeed them, and aucubas, and bays. A few Others essay their chances at a bid then; lazily, and with tame indifference, the-take-it-or-leave-it plain upon them; and they get four cupresses "knocked down" to them for five shillings and sixpence (though there they remain, standing, in all their plentiful and graceful promise); and they get four more for sixpence less; and two bay-trees for three shillings; and eight gooseberry-bushes for a florin; and twelve *taxus japonicas* for five shillings; and six box-trees for two shillings; and seven good seedling pines for half-a-crown; and three golden yews for the same money; there being no surety that they will buy even this, for a dozen lots

are put up without a bid at all—for a group of lots is withdrawn—for two lots are put together—for some lots are passed by—for there is the auction stopping still, at last, no auction, the auctioneer puzzled, and in despair.

Let us look round. Here are men here, who have gradually lounged in, and sauntered down the slope to be within sight and hearing. They are men with freckled necks and freckled faces, wearing sandy beards, and sandy waistcoats, and sandy soft felt hats. Here are men gartered, that is, they are belted and buckled under the knee, with the difference that the belt is leather, the buckle steel, and the decoration worn to lift their trousers up from being muddled. Here are men with brown knitted waistcoats; with yellow-ochre plush waistcoats; with speckled straw hats considerably torn; with stained old "billycocks" smeared with clay. Here is a boy stooping to try and teach a rough grey-terrier pup to balance a cabbage-stalk on his nose. Here are two young ladies, waiting smilingly for the sale to get as far on as the geraniums, and ferns, and camellias in the greenhouses, and arranging that, when they have successfully made their bids, they will cast lots with one another for plant and plant. Here is a boy, on the field edge at the far end; just where the garden finishes with a row of golden willows, and where the earth cuts up again, with dwarfed bramble-bushes, and great wide nettles, and rugged chalk; he has his figure bold against the sky, and his place is chosen because he can overlook all with a comprehensive view. Here is a carter, forearmed for the sleepiness and forgetfulness he is in fear of, by having his brass-ringed whip tied about his wrist, since then he will be sure not to lay it down and lose it. Here is a cluster of ragged little village school-children, picking up dead pods and husks, and berries, and getting quarrelsome; "punches" from one to another being administered, and fresh "punches" from the little doubled-up fists being threatened very freely to come.

And some of these men are thickly ignorant, not knowing asparagus seed-heads when they see them, and having to ask; and some look at the spruces and laurels, not ignorantly at all, but admiringly, loading them with praise; and some stalk, with their sandy-coloured legs, right over rows of little sturdy cedruses, and arborvitæs, and pyrenascas,

and stalk again in and out of yews, and laurels, and neat spruce-firs; and some stride across drills of turnips and other drills of taller horse-radish, all listlessly and despondingly, without, at last, the utterance of a sound.

Considering all which, is there likely to be the smallest purchase, by anyone of these, from pages farther on in the catalogue, of "well-selected stock-in-trade," of "garden-frames," of "glass conservatories," of "numerous other effects?"

The auctioneer evidently would not answer this question in the affirmative. The Others, as evidently, would not answer this question in the affirmative either. Hope is gone from all, collapse is upon everyone. Seven-eighths of them are of the sort that never dream of spending a shilling or a penny on an ornamental shrub themselves; but everyone of them feels sad, and depressed, and melancholy, because ornamental shrubs are not being bought lavishly and enthusiastically by everybody else. In short, hands are buried very deeply into pockets, heads droop gloomily, eyes are never lifted from the ground.

A stir comes, however. There is a vigorous voice drawing near; there is the approach of resolute feet.

"A-ah, there'll be some money spent now, I lay!" exclaims the dark man with the dark scar.

He is comforted, as is everybody else. It is because a nobleman and a gentleman (or he may be both) is seen coming in at the garden-gate. It is because this nobleman or gentleman has his gardener with him, is followed by another nobleman or gentleman, is followed by yet a third, with the result that each person "pulls himself together" into sale-shapeability again, that the auctioneer is as if he were metamorphosed into a chanticleer — he has such full sonorousness and triumph.

"Lot Twenty-five!" he cries, going back, in the coolest manner, to the lots long since passed over unbid for; and lo! the two nurserymen and all the Others act up to the part he is acting up to, and make no protest, or tell no tales as the plants composing the lots are criticised good-humouredly, are competed for good-humouredly, are actually sold.

"I am so glad!" cries the cheery salesman, for things are to his taste now—are level with his views of commerce and his reputation. "First-rate!" he cries again. "Send home for my nightcap! I'm not half tired. I don't care a bit about being late."

And as the light wind blows the heads of the pampas grasses, and rustles the coral berries of the asparagus plants gone to seed, the buyers, the bidders, the sympathetic onlookers, sweep along from plum-tree to damson, from slip-apple to espalier, from May Duke cherry to Cox's orange pippin, just as the auctioneer leads them, and just as his vanguard, his grave assistant with the stick, waves for them all to come; and lot follows lot in proper succession (though still at prices that are laughable), and bells might be set up ringing as accompaniment, all things are going so successfully.

There are several noteworthy incidents. There is a lot, comprising a Warwickshire pippin and a pear-tree, selling (the two trees) for six shillings; with the rush, helter-skelter, of the company to get to them, and the eager scanning by each person in turn of the gardener's dangling labels to see if they have correct description. There is another apple-tree, of fine full growth, close by, "gone" for two shillings, with the auctioneer's joke (much appreciated), "Now you've got it, put it in a pot!" There is the interested enquiry of some cottagers, newly arrived: "Have they come yet to the currant-trees?" There are the currant-trees when they really are come to, the grave assistant running between the rows of them to show how far each lot goes, and nine dozen of the plants going for ten shillings. Added to which, there is the energy of one of the bidding nurserymen, having his lots uprooted at the minute of his buying, there and then. There is the deliciously droll and deaf old gardener he unexpectedly employs, who shouts out loudly for the loan of a "spay-up," that he may set to and begin to dig at once.

"I'd ha' brought one if I'd ha' know-ud," is his stentorian explanation. And he continues to shout out a long series of comments at the same pitch, unconscious that he is to be heard above the bidding, and that everybody is in high amusement.

And, besides this, there is the rustle of all the leaves and branches as the group of people moves, with the opportune action of a small boy picking all the berries off the Irish yews for a gratis feed. There is a whole-drill of purple pickling cabbages (thirty plants, quite) selling for eighteen-pence, with the radiant possessor proceeding at once to cut them, heart-way, out of their stalks for wheeling away in a truck just outside. There are the garden wheel-

barrows, chalked with the numbers of the lots they form, and set up against other chalk numbers on the greenhouse-walls, with the criticism of the adepts in that kind of helpful equipage that, "Maybe they'll bid for those, as they seem middlin' good." There is a friendly man, exclaiming: "Lend me your pencil, will you?" when the pencil he wants to borrow is in another man's mouth, he himself taking the pencil out, bar all ceremony, and straightway putting it to ready use. There is a forbidding-looking man, who might be an East-end costermonger, slit-eyed, slit-mouthed, downcast, who turns out to be quite an industrious digger-up of other people's purchases, when, in answer to the curt question, "Figure?" he says, "Three shillings," he is engaged, and works in all mildness and propriety. There is the auctioneer, with the jokes that double up all the men's bodies as if by magic, that, quite as magically, jerk open joyously all the men's eager mouths.

"Don't boil those cabbages, Tom, before you get home," is one of these waited-for brilliant utterances.

This is another:

"This lot will grow well, up in that land of yours." The point being clearly that the Other addressed has no land anywhere for a tree to grow on at all.

This is one more:

"I should like to see a cat climbing up it!" The lot being an *auracaria umbricata* (the monkey-plant), and the joke being served as a savoury side-dish whilst noblemen and gentlemen are criticising the plant, considering whether it will entice them to make a bid.

Finally, when the plant sale has at last to be left, there is the cheery auctioneer still astride a flower-bed, cheerily "offering" on. Noblemen and gentlemen may be scarce in his neighbourhood, but he has had a task allotted to him, and he is going on with it so manfully, he is sure to bring it to a successful end.

IN THE SUNNY RHINELAND.

VIII.

I FELT that it would be downright wicked, and quite out of character with the place, to get up a quarrel at *Schlängenbad*; and yet this was what John proposed to me, and contemplated the prospect apparently with some complacency. He didn't mind getting me into trouble, that was quite evident. If I spoke to the vicomte, as he

proposed, and that person resented my interference, clearly the quarrel that might ensue would be on my shoulders altogether; and even if I did not share my friend's theoretical objections to the duel, yet my practical objections were many and strong.

One feels that the practice is kept up mainly for the benefit of foreign politicians and journalists, including the authors who write the *feuilletons*. And when two deputies go out together, the result, in the shape of increased kudos with their political adherents, is pretty sure to be satisfactory. Also such an event runs up the circulation of a journal; and, in the case of an author, to have gone through a duel entitles him to make up two or three chapters on the encounter and its preliminaries in every future romance. But to me, in that connection, the whole affair would be valueless; the most murderous duel ever fought would not be worth a copper to me. What was I doing in that particular galley at all, for the matter of that?

And yet, such is the inconsistency of man, I was not content to be out of the fight altogether. Assuredly, if the vicomte were making love to my princess, he ought to be suppressed in some way. But then, was not John, perhaps, making a fuss about nothing? His wife was handsome, and fond of admiration; there was nothing else in it. That was the most comfortable hypothesis anyhow. Just then the turret-clock strikes ten, and we hear a little stir below, then the dulcet tones of John's wife, rather bitter-sweet, calling to him.

"Well, what is it now?" replies John from the top of the stairs.

"Those bath-tickets, John. Where did you put them? I shall lose my turn."

John dutifully hurries downstairs, and presently I hear them going off together in a perfectly *Darby-and-Joan*-like manner. Mrs. John is very particular about her baths, since she has found that they impart a peculiar lustre to the complexion. I must say that she comes forth into the world again perfectly radiant.

As for Madame Reimer, "Can you wash a blackamoor white?" she asks, laughing; but she takes her soaking regularly nevertheless.

"Can you make an old woman young again, ma chère?" asks Madame de Beau-lieu, who has just come out of the dark resounding cave where the bathing is going on.

"My dear Aglaé," replies Madame Reimer, "how can you talk of age? If it were I now!

I feel that I am years older than you. But then you have been so happy!"

And the two women sigh, the one over her happiness apparently, the other over her want of it. Certainly Madame de Beaulieu looks almost as young as her step-daughter, the vicomtesse. By-the-way, I have made a discovery. Our Aglaé is the sister of the recreant Hector, who elected to go with his native soil and become a German.

Madame having married the comte years before the war—it was an alliance between high nobility and heavy money-bags, in which the bride's youth and good looks were thrown into the scale upon the top of the dross, by way of giving good weight—madame, of course, remains always French. We have had a little talk together about Madame Reimer and her old sweetheart. The latter, it seems, also married, but has been left a widower with one little girl. What could be nicer and pleasanter, madame asks, than that the two old lovers should come together again? He is rich, and she, poor thing, is not well off, and she would make an excellent mother to the little girl. Of course there is the little obstacle of the missing husband, but probably the doubt as to his fate will soon be set at rest. Hector, with his commercial relations, has so many means of getting to know things; and he has, unknown to Madame Reimer, started enquiries in the Brazils, where Monsieur Reimer was last heard of.

"Of course Herr Hector will come here to meet Madame Reimer?" I hazard.

"Well, no," replied the comtesse; "he does not get on well with my beaufils, nor too well with my husband. Ah, here he comes, my poor Eson, out of his caldron!" And she runs forward gracefully to give the old gentleman her arm.

It is my turn now. The old bath-master is waiting there, and waves his thermometer-stick imperiously for me to approach. I don't see any particular objection to the same bath building being used by persons of both sexes, and certainly the plan is more sociable. If you occasionally find a hair-pin in the bath, that is hardly an objection, for it is a useful little instrument capable of being adapted to many purposes; and if a faint suspicion of musk or millefleurs lingers about the room, that is quite as acceptable as the aroma of stale tobacco left behind him by Herr Mosenthal, the money-spinner from Hamburg.

It is a practice that grows upon one,

this lying in soak in transparent milk; only I fear very much that my mahogany complexion, in which I have rather prided myself hitherto, is gradually peeling off and being succeeded by a cream-coloured tint suffused by a delicate flush; and then the dreadful misgiving arises—how about my nose, which I can't conveniently keep submerged for any length of time, should that be the only feature to retain its mahogany hue? From the bath, on my way to the reading-room, I meet our Princess Amy with a party of strangers; no vicomte in attendance, but instead, a very handsome distinguished-looking man, whom I had not seen before. Her highness, who was chatting away in her schoolgirl French, nodded, smiled saucily, and passed on. The reading-room is in our particular Kurhaus, a handsome room in brown and gold, where they take *The Times*, three or four Paris journals, sundry German, and many more Russian newspapers. There I found John, who had got *The Times*, and seemed determined to read it right through. There was no one else in the room except the librarian, who sat perched on a tall stool, making entries in a big book. I wondered what they were about, these entries, for I never saw anybody ever take out a book.

"Met Amy?" asked John in a pause between the parliamentary debates and the police intelligence.

I nodded assent. "Didn't make out the people she was with, though."

"The Lorikoffs," said John with gentle pride. "You've heard of Prince Lorikoff, the Russian ex-vice-emperor. European reputation! Well, they have just taken up their quarters in that big suite of rooms on the ground-floor. Amy made friends with the princess at once; and the prince seems charmed with Amy. Gad!" said John with a subdued smirk, "I think we shall top the Benyon Browns yet. They sneered at our little trip up the Rhine, but when they hear about the Lorikoffs they will be green with jealousy."

Finding that John was likely to occupy and be occupied with *The Times* for some time to come, I wandered out into the grounds to try and find somebody to talk to. But the place seemed deserted, except for the gardeners at work at the flower-beds, and the tall graceful washer-maidens with their baskets; and so I descended on a tour of exploration into the village.

One's first impression that there are no shops in Schlangenbad is hardly a correct

one. I failed, indeed, to discover a butcher or a baker, but there are certain houses where letting lodgings is combined with a trade in Colonienwaaren and Handlung of various kinds, and there are two bazaars, each of the extent of a good-sized packing-case, where you can buy perfumery and trinkets, and the rest is all hotel and pension. Climbing the hillside, one comes upon the Pariser Hof, full of Germans; the Englischer Hof, where the Dutch are in the ascendant; a Kaiser's house, of course, and a Russischer Kaiser too, with Zur Rose and Zur Post. And this last is actually in some way connected with our post-office, a really smart little office, where the officials are positively amiable and courteous. It is the air of Schlangenbad, no doubt, that has thus transformed them. And the post-office is also the railway and diligence bureau; and at that window, where sits the martial-looking man in uniform, you can book for London, Paris, Vienna—where you please.

And here my exploration ends, for at this moment the clock strikes one, and all of a sudden Schlangenbad seems transformed into a piece of animated clockwork. The post-office window closes with a bang, and bells begin to tinkle everywhere. The lately-deserted road is now dotted with pedestrians wending their way in one direction, at a uniform leisurely pace, which carries out the clockwork illusion; if some of the figures hobble a little, it is because wheelwork cannot be made perfect. Certain internal mechanism in our own system compels us to join this general progress to the dinner-table.

In the lobby, outside the great dining salle, there is quite a press of people. The feminine community is stopping to hang up hats and wrappers, and there is a confusion of female belongings, and great piles of plates and dishes, with relays of glasses and regiments of long-necked bottles. But there is order in this apparent confusion, everybody's place is marked out according to a system that looks to the number of your room and your seniority as a guest, as factors in the resulting combination.

Thus it happens that I am a long way from John and his womenkind, who are nearly at the top, while I am decidedly within a few rounds of the very bottom of the ladder. No doubt the courteous steward would put me next to my friends if I desired it, but I don't desire it.

They have got their princely friends just above them, and don't seem to miss me in

the least. Well, a little change is not unpleasant; perhaps I may find some companionable person in the new people about me.

Before the soup is finished, I have got into talk with my neighbour, who happens to be an Englishman, travelling with his wife from one bath-place to another, a little in search of health, but more of amusement, combined with the pursuit of millionaires. His weakness for the latter appeared on the surface. I had hardly finished negotiating the needlelike bones of my morsel of carp when he began to descend on the plethora of money, and the difficulty of placing the spare thousands that, in spite of all one's precautions, came tumbling in at inconvenient times.

Finding that I had no particular sympathy with this kind of trouble, my neighbour suddenly lost his interest in me as a person who might possibly prove a desirable acquaintance, and began to enter into conversation with two men on the opposite side of the table, Colonienwaaren it seemed, wanderers from the antipodes, casual visitors, who had walked over the hills that morning from Schwalbach.

"Now that man," said my new friend in a whisper, indicating the elder of the two, who looked like the cultivated English country gentleman of twenty years ago, "that man solemnly must be worth a couple of million, all realised property, in Australia."

I did not doubt my neighbour's information, for he appeared to have an infallible nose for millionaires; but not otherwise a respecter of persons. I tried to point out to him Prince Lorikoff.

"I don't think he's much," rejoined my new friend; "in debt to the Jews, I dare say, like most of these Russian swells. Mosenthal, there, has bills of his to a pretty tune, you may depend," pointing out a fat jellified man, who sat with his wife, a handsome luxuriant woman, at the very bottom of the table.

And thus we added our quota to the clatter and babble of voices, mingled with the clash of dishes that filled the room. There must have been nearly two hundred people there, Russians, Poles, Belgians, Dutch, Hungarians, Danes, and Swedes, a varied many-coloured weft upon the sturdy German warp; and everybody talked at once, the flow of words rather stimulated than checked by a simultaneous attack upon the eatables. Female voices predominated, and, indeed, two-thirds of the

guests probably were women. And didn't these make play with their knives and forks—with their knives especially! Like the jolly young waterman, they feathered their blades with such skill and dexterity, that, seeing the free and fearless way in which they spooned up their victuals therewith, all nervous dread disappeared, and the sight became positively pleasing.

This free use of the knife in eating is all the more remarkable, inasmuch as, in other respects, the manners of the blade-swallowers were quite unexceptionable. It is a national trait, no doubt, and hangs to the Spartan training of a nation resolved to become great by way of blood and iron. In other respects our banquet is not at all Spartan, but a marvellous good dinner, the Schlangenbad beef, especially, being remarkable for flavour and tenderness. One might think the meal too elaborate for a midday performance, but no, there is something in the open-air life that goes well with these primitive hours; they correspond with the scenery, as our poet would say. And talking of the poet, to our great satisfaction, just as the day begins to drag a little, a carriage comes out of the shadowed archway of trees, a carriage full of Americans. The poet is there, and the drover, and all the girls in blue serge and blue veils. I have hardly had time to notice these girls before, but now that Princess Amy is disporting with her prince, and Madame Reimer is occupied with her dear friends, I have leisure to observe that the elder ones are rather faded, but that there is one sweet young thing, graceful as a fawn, with soft dark eyes, but fragile-looking to a degree quite painful. As for Jossie, she looks prematurely aged and worn with the weight of things she has got to remember; but the drover, her brother, who has resumed his long drugged coat, and who thinks that the fresh air of Schlangenbad even requires a muffler—the drover, with his happy way of casting all responsibility on his female relatives, seems gayer and more buoyant than ever. But, alas, the poet doesn't share my appreciation of the charms of Schlangenbad.

"It is circumscribed, sir; it is narrow. Considering the elevation, there should be more extensive views."

And the drover looks uneasily about him, and not making out any fellow-countryman, begins to feel out of his element.

"It strikes me, Jossie, we've got a little out of the regular Yewropian track. There's a scarcity of castles, too, in the neighbour-

hood. Say, Silas, I don't think they'd better take the horses out."

They had been staying a day at Wiesbaden, and had been persuaded to drive over here. But they rather regret their wasted time evidently. They have concluded to train it on this night to Basle, where they hope to strike once more the real Yewropian track. And so they drive away with rather more speed and clatter than is quite allowable at Schlangenbad. And, as Bunyan might say, I saw them no more.

By this time the band is at work on the terrace, and all the world has turned out to walk about or drink tea under the shade of the spreading beech-trees.

The comte shakes his stick at me in a friendly way.

"You should have more consideration for that ill-used foot, monsieur."

The vicomte is walking with his wife, who looks quite flattered and gratified, poor thing!

Madame Reimer, who is with them, detains me by a gesture.

"I have been wanting to speak to you all day, but you seem to have avoided us."

"Not at all; it was just the other way, I thought."

"I quite understand," said Madame Reimer, smiling maliciously. "The vicomte, too, is in a very bad temper, but he knows how to conceal it. But, courage, my friend, the wind will change."

At this moment we encountered on the terrace a tall distinguished-looking dame, dressed in the height of the fashion, carrying a parasol with a huge clublike handle. At a distance you might have thought her young and beautiful, but, as she approached, you saw the ravages that time had made, the wrinkled cheeks, the sunken eyes that reminded you of extinct volcanoes. The tripping walk was a hobble in disguise, and she leant heavily on her parasol, which might have been a crutch.

When she was well out of hearing, the comte turned round:

"I remember that old woman forty years ago, when I was attached to the embassy at St. Petersburg."

"Mon cher," cried his wife, tapping him with her fan, "you! And forty years ago! It must have been as a nourrisson then!"

"Ah, flatterer!" cried the comte, shaking his finger playfully at his wife; "but, seriously, forty years ago that woman was in the prime of her youth and beauty, and she was celebrated too. She had just

burnt down her château, a magnificent residence stored with all kinds of treasures, merely to rid herself of a husband she detested."

"And she succeeded?"

"But, yes; the poor man was burnt to a cinder, together with sundry domestics, and with the loss of an unrivalled collection of oriental porcelain. She has had many husbands since, but has contrived to get rid of them in a less extravagant fashion. And now she wanders about as you see, mostly alone; for she is not so rich as she was, poor woman. She occupies the farthest annexe of these buildings, and is obliged to take the whole of it; for, I assure you, her cries in the dead of night are sufficient to appal the stoutest heart."

At the next turn we met the hollow-eyed woman again, and a faint light of recognition seemed to glow in those dim orbits.

The comte took off his hat; the baronne smiled graciously. There was a meeting, a presentation, and presently an amalgamation. The comtesse and the baronne exchanged news of people they knew, people of yesterday and to-day; allusions to auld lang syne were naturally tabooed.

I fell behind with Madame Reimer.

"The horrid woman!" said the latter. "Does she not make you shudder?"

"Well, no." I was constrained to confess that there was a kind of fascination about her, even in spite of her age and her wrinkles. "The tigress who has eaten a man or two is far more interesting than the insipid creature who has lived on beef bones all her life in some zoological garden. And if, perchance, the fervid creature should cast favourable eyes upon one, the temptation would be great to try one's luck where so many had failed. How could one possibly be dull with the constant excitement of watching for the slightest symptom of a homicidal tendency on the part of one's carnivorous mate?"

"A tigress? Oh no!" replied Madame Reimer; "she reminds one rather of some yellow wrinkled serpent."

However, we probably both of us wronged the poor old lady grievously. I learnt afterwards that she was very charitable and kind-hearted, and had impaired her fortune by philanthropic schemes, while her sympathy with the liberal party had caused her to be practically exiled from her own country.

Perhaps this last, indeed, was the head and front of her offending, for I found

that the worthy comte was ready to believe any evil of people of that way of thinking.

And as for the nightly screams—well, my room was immediately beneath the house she occupied, and I was never disturbed in that way; but, in truth, she had charge of a niece, who was subject to epileptic fits, and for whose benefit she wandered about from one bath-place to another; and this may have given rise to the story.

Soon we saw the Australians trudging along in the shade on their way to Schwalbach. We Schlangenbadians are a little jealous of Schwalbach, which is five miles away, and a hundred feet or so higher than we are. Our waters are of soothing and cosmetic properties, and theirs are of a tonic and tanning nature; and English people don't come here much, while over the hills they are present in full force. My friend the million lover—I must get John's wife to find an appropriate name for him, but at the present moment we are not on sufficiently amicable terms—has just come over from Schwalbach, and gives me an account of its English visitors. He describes them as of the high Brahminical order of beings.

There is Canon Crumplehorn, with seven daughters, tall and severe, and Dr. Calcium of Savile Row, with an Oxford don or two, and sundry legal luminaries, people who have come to be braced up for the severer duties of life. The water there is a sort of ferruginous fizz, that sparkles about you, as if you were a crumb in a glass of champagne, and that impregnates the frame with a species of red rust.

For my own part, I have not an iron frame, and I am sure the waters would not suit me; I should curl up under their influence like a caterpillar on a hot shovel. At Schwalbach, the inhabitants venerate the memory of the worthy author of the *Bubbles*. They have placed his bust in the Kursaal; indeed he is almost the tutelary deity of the place, and was known in his lifetime as the "Protector," or, according to some, as the "Emperor" of Schwalbach. Here we talk of him with respect indeed, but not without a touch of regret for his unaccountable preference for our rival. John, indeed, has had doubts whether it would not be better to go on to Schwalbach, where he might be more in his element; but as I have privately warned his wife that the waters there would turn her fair skin to a warm brown, and cover her lovely hair with red rust, his prospects of getting his own way are not very promising.

To-night we are all good friends again. The Lorikoffs have driven over to Schwalbach, and are not coming back till late. Our Princess Amy is as amiable as possible, and as we are all very hungry, in spite of our allowance of three little rolls and a complete tea, it is agreed that we shall have supper by starlight. And after supper we walk up and down the covered promenade.

People here go to bed soon after dark ; at least they retire into seclusion, and from nine to ten seems to be the servants' hour. Smart *femmes de chambre* flit about in couples, chattering vivaciously their Parisian argot, and the comte's own man is enjoying his cigarette in a secluded corner. The waiters too unbend, and exchange jocose remarks with the *femmes de chambre*. Then, also, steal out from their underground cells the working-bees of the establishment, the gardeners and the men who stoke the fires, smoking their big pipes. Alas for the German pipe, has that also to be numbered among things that are passing away ? When the old gardener is dead and the old stoker, will their pipes be buried with them, and no man evermore inhale a cloud from their capacious bowls ? When I first planned my German tour—years ago, and unfulfilled till now—I pictured myself wandering about in a cap, broad-peaked, and with sundry spiral stages and a huge tassel ; in a grey linen blouse, with a knapsack over my shoulder, and smoking a huge china pipe. Well, the pipe is exploded. Workmen, tradesmen, all the world smoke cigars. Nobody of the present day, who hopes to live and thrive, can afford to give the care and attention necessary to keep those grand but cumbrous machines in order. And perhaps the English workman is unfairly handicapped in that he is obliged to stick to his pipe for the want of cheap cigars.

To return to our promenade. I was sure that my princess wanted something of me, she was so amiable ; and I had rightly divined, for when John and Madame Reimer were at the opposite end of the promenade, she beckoned me to a seat and began.

She was in a dreadful mess, and didn't know how to get out of it. It was about the Lorikoffs. Well, it was all her fault, she admitted humbly. She had learnt that Prince Lorikoff and family had just arrived, and hearing these people called by the same name, as she thought, she had jumped to the natural conclusion that these were indeed the Lorikoffs.

But it turned out that they were the Koriloffs—Professor Koriloff and family ; the professor being, in fact, professor of the art of prestidigitation ; to speak plainly, a conjurer. A most charming man, and so amusing ! She didn't regret having made his acquaintance a bit ; and the wife was very nice too, and the daughter. Well, it all came out when the Koriloffs were about to start for Schwalbach, where the professor was going to give an entertainment, and the wife had asked her—oh, so prettily !—to take some tickets for his entertainment here on the following night. Well, up to this there was nothing to trouble about ; nobody, at least no outsiders, knew of the mistake. John would have laughed at her a little, but there would have been an end. But, having been so friendly with these people, how could she have drawn back then ?

"The seats were ten shillings each, and I took five-pounds' worth," said John's wife, half-crying ; "and I don't know what John will say to me—he was scolding me only this morning for having spent such a lot of money."

Well, I couldn't help thinking that John would be likely to say something very unpleasant about what he would naturally stigmatise as "chucking a fiver clean away." She had acted in her usual generous impulsive way, and I admired her all the more for it, and it pleased me that she should patronise old Koriloff, whom I had hitherto regarded as a prince ; but then my own resources were not affected by her generosity—at least so I then thought.

"But, monsieur," continued my companion in the most seductive voice, "if I could dispose of some of these tickets, it would soften the scolding I shall get. I thought perhaps you would take two."

"Oh, certainly," I replied, but not so much gratified as I ought to have been at this proof of comradeship. "Certainly, I will take two, and," maliciously, "probably the vicomte will be good for another two."

"Monsieur !" cried my princess in a wounded voice, her great soft eyes suddenly suffused, "I haven't deserved this."

I could have bitten my tongue out for having wounded her like that. Let her only forgive me, and I would do anything she wanted.

"Two tickets ? I will take four !"

"You really will take four ?" she cried, brightening up. "Oh, that is nice ! Four for you, and one each for John, Madame

Reimer, and myself. He won't mind that. And then there is only thirty shillings to account for, and I can easily fudge that. 'A friend in need is a friend indeed !'

But the friend indeed found those tickets to weigh heavily upon his mind. They were not negotiable in any way that I could see. I could not even avail myself of the privilege of seating myself in solitary grandeur in the midst of my four seats, for I had not a distant approach to an evening suit, and my sunburnt garments had derived no benefit from the cosmetic virtues of the Serpent's bath. No, it was all a dead loss, to be put down under the head of general expenses, and I had calculated on saving money at Schlangenbad! But, anyhow, I felt that this was better than fighting a duel with the vicomte.

John took the announcement of the mistake about the Lorikoff's very pleasantly. As nobody but ourselves knew about it, there was no harm done, and he only gently scolded his wife for her extravagance. After all, perhaps, it was well to show that English people were not to be outdone by serene highnesses.

"But while you were about it, Amy, why didn't you get a ticket for Fred ?"

"Poor fellow ! Did you think I had forgotten him ?" cried the wife, producing another ticket from her pocket.

Thus I am the happy possessor of five vouchers for M. Lorikoff's entertainment. As for not being able to go to it, John says that is all nonsense. There must be a dépôt somewhere about the place where dress-suits are kept on hand. With such an army of waiters, the clothing of them can hardly be left to chance.

We had separated for the night, when John came up to my room for a chat.

"We have got leave for extra cigars," he said, producing some ; "and now, old fellow, I want to ask you a favour. I don't know that I shall want it, but if I should, could you let me have ten or fifteen pounds, say ? You see, Amy is so extravagant that I'm running shorter than I expected."

Now, I knew very well that John could not possibly want to borrow money of me. He had a little wallet filled with circular notes. I had seen him counting them over when he thought that nobody was looking at him. Then what was his motive ? Well, probably to ascertain if there was any danger of my wanting to borrow from him. Hence I dissimulated.

"Will fifteen be enough ?" I asked, as

if I had the resources of Rothschild at my back.

"Oh, plenty," replied John. "Indeed, I don't suppose I shall want it at all, only I like being on the safe side."

About that there is not the shadow of a doubt. The side which is the safe one will always command John's support ; but, had he known, he need not have been uneasy. I had rather go to Spandau—which is the state prison, I suppose ; and if I fail in my engagements here, I imagine my royal creditor will lock me up in one of his royal castles—I had rather go to Spandau, and trust to escaping à la Trench, than borrow anything from John. Otherwise, I am not quite such a donkey as to travel thus far without the means of finding my way home again, Master John. That is to say, unless my money is conjured out of my pocket.

John leaves me when his cigar is smoked out, but I am too comfortable and too indolent to move, reclining on my sofa by the window, with the stars shining down upon me and a soft breeze rustling among the trees. The lights go out one by one in the house above, except in one window, still brilliantly illuminated. That is the baronne's chamber, no doubt, where she keeps solitary vigil ; but there are no shrieks, as I have said before. With us everything is dark and silent. The carriage returned with the Koriloffs half an hour ago, and the slight movement of life occasioned by their arrival has died away. There is nothing to be heard but the rustle of leaves and the soft babble of the brook. But I hear a sash opened just below, and lean out to look. Yes, it is Madame Reimer, who leans upon the bar of the window and looks upward at the starry sky. There is a soft contented expression on her face. I fancy that she draws something from her bosom and presses it to her lips ; but the light is uncertain, and presently she shuts the window, and the whole world seems to sleep.

The falling to sleep under such circumstances was delightful, but the awakening not so pleasant. The moon had risen—an old decayed moon—and her red sinister light was fully upon one corner of the room—a hitherto unexplored corner. And the light, too, in the baronne's chamber seemed more brilliant than ever, and to mingle with the moonlight, which it rivalled in its sinister hopeless glare. Altogether, I wished I were in bed and asleep, for it was probably two or three

o'clock in the morning ; but, somehow, that unexplored corner of the room, which the moonlight reached, and seemed to search into, had an irresistible attraction for me. There was something lying there that did not belong to me—something half covered by a canvas wrapper. I pulled away the wrapper and saw a long iron-bound chest, in shape and appearance very much like a coffin—a child's coffin. I looked anxiously for the matches, to investigate this strange phenomenon by candlelight ; but I searched everywhere, and upset all my belongings, before I found them in my coat-pocket. And then I found that, so far from being a coffin, this was a box—a great box of books that had come express, post-haste, from London to Schlangenbad several years ago, and had been lying unopened in this dusty corner ever since. So far from there being anything uncanny about it, that box might be expected to be a defence against all the powers of evil, for it bore the impress of what we will call The Society for the Distribution of Scripture Literature at Home and Abroad. The box was addressed to one Jenkins. Yes, I can picture Jenkins now. He occupied this room, no doubt ; had a carpet, and left the nails sticking up, for the benefit of his successors. And that box of pious literature—what a loss to the world of Schlangenbad that it should have been bottled up so long ! Shall I act the part of the fisherman in the Arabian Nights, and let Evangel out of his prison ? No, I think not. The liberated spirit might serve me even worse than the genie in the story. Besides, my own impulse would be—seeing how charming and how comfortable things are at Schlangenbad, how cheap the dinners, and how good ; the hearty enjoyment of the good things of life, with due temperance in their use, with the civility and friendliness of people, the absence of foolish display—my impulse would certainly be rather to find out the particular text-books that might be in use in the neighbourhood, and ship a boxful of them to my native land.

As the days pass on in pleasant uniformity my range of observation becomes more extensive. I am no longer chained by the foot, as it were, to the precincts of the Kurhaus, and the walks and benches adjoining. And, first of all, to pass under that cool sombre archway of foliage which seems to lead away into shadowland. But there is quite a settlement on the other side, tall lodging-houses, and even, I think,

a pension for young women. Anyhow, there are a lot of these playing croquet at odd times on a square of gravel, and each house has its little bower excavated, as it were, in the woods that come down to the very verge of the road, where people eat, and drink, and smoke. And there is a little promontory, wellshaded and overlooking the valley, with seats, where it is pleasant to sit. It would be a wild wooded gorge this, but for the tall cheerful white houses with their sunblinds. There are patches of upland pasture cut out soft and velvetlike from the accompanying forest, and one little green corner, where a few crosses mark the resting-places of the dead. The soft sheen of the beech woods is darkened here and there by clumps of pines, and tall poplars rise from the shaven lawns below, where white paths wind in and out among the flower-beds. Others, too, have come to love this shaded nook, and sorrowed to leave it. On the little plateau, where we sit, is a column of antique form that might have been an altar to nymphs and dryads, and on one side an inscription within a wreath, "VALETE. VII. AVG. MDCCX." I should like to know the history that lies beneath this simple inscription and date, but nobody can tell me anything about it.

Then, by climbing the heights above by a path that zigzags among woods and rocks—rich-coloured crumbling rocks, studded with their veins of marble and porphyry—you reach a little mountain temple, where the valley lies stretched before you like a map, and the eye can trace it till it loses itself in the tawny vineyards below, with a glimpse of the Rhine valley and the hills beyond faintly shining through the soft haze.

And in the evening the emerald glow of the forest tempts us to wander farther into its recesses. We meet the cows coming home, and the little urchins who drive them. The forest-keeper strides sturdily along, and is lost to sight in the dim glades. Birds sing softly to each other—and there I have you, Madame Reimer.

The forests in France are sweet, indeed, but they are not vocal like these. The birds sing to each other, but they seem also to sing to us, tempting us farther and farther. You can fancy Hansel wandering here with his Gretel, and the witches' cottage is surely in that darksome brake.

"And the flower that dispels enchantment ; shall we look for that ?"

"Ah no !" cries Madame Reimer,

clasping her hands. "Let us rather look for the herb that transforms."

It cannot be far to seek. Surely there is a glamour over everything, and when we come to an opening, and see the soft sweet country below lying fold on fold, with a glimpse of the silver sheen of the distant Rhine, one feels the potency of the spell that binds the people to its fatherland.

Yes, you must wander long in the forest and listen attentively to its many voices, and then, perhaps, you will gain an inkling of the real Teuton's spirit.

Something of its gloom, and something of its depth, of its passion, quietude, and long endurance—something, perhaps, of the sluggish broodiness of its stagnant air, the forest has imparted to the genius of the race.

As for the square methodical Prussian drill-sergeant, I leave him out of the record altogether.

"Oh, I am grateful for that distinction," cries Madame Reimer. "Then I may still hate the Prussians, and, perhaps, after all, come to like the Germans a little?"

"All nonsense," cries Amy, who seems rather to resent Madame Reimer's possible conversion. "All nonsense about your Teutonic spirit. I see fat buxom girls, and homely women, and men who are always eating, drinking, and smoking; and men who take precious good care never to lose themselves in a forest or anywhere else when they are out of sight of beer-glasses and long-necked bottles."

"Ah, my dear Amy," rejoined Madame Reimer, "men are everywhere the same—gross and selfish creatures. When we meet with one out of the herd who is kind and true and steadfast, we ought to treasure him as a jewel of price."

Amy tossed her head at this. She fancied, perhaps, that Madame Reimer was reading her a little lecture.

But nothing of the sort was probably in the little woman's mind. I hardly understood her then, but I think I do now.

THE QUESTION OF CAIN.

BY MRS. CASHEL HOEY.

CHAPTER XXVIII. ANOTHER LITTLE DINNER.

"I CANNOT say I think you are looking your best this evening," said Mrs. Mabberley to Beatrix, as the two ladies were being conveyed in Mrs. Mabberley's soberly-appointed brougham the short

distance that divided her house from Miss Chevenix's former home in Chesterfield Street. It was their first time of meeting that day, and Beatrix was out of humour.

"I daresay not," she answered with supreme indifference, "I am tired; it is a bore to have to dress myself, and I do not care how I look to-night."

"For people who are only my friends—I understand." Nothing could be sweeter than the manner of Mrs. Mabberley, or more complaisant than her smile. "But I don't know that you are right," she added. "When one's business in life is what yours is, it is well to use every opportunity, and wise to despise no means."

"I don't see that this is an opportunity, or that these people can put any means to my end in my way. You have never told me anything about them that could interest me."

"No? Well, I suppose I have not. They are not in either your old or your new set, certainly; but still I hope you will be civil to them."

"I am hardly likely to go to people's houses and be rude there!"

"I do not know that, by any means," said her candid friend in a tone whose untroubled evenness grated on the ear of Beatrix. "You have such a very bad temper that it is impossible for you to have quite good manners; and I think it is not impossible your temper may get the better of your manners to-night. Keep it in order, my dear, I advise you."

The carriage stopped at the door of Beatrix's old house; as she stepped out she glanced upwards at the drawing-room window. The balconies were bare of flowers, and there were no bird-cages there, as there had been in her time.

Inside the house the aspect of things was also changed; the furniture was indeed the same, but the different character and mode of life of the occupants revealed themselves in the primness of its arrangement, and by certain changes which the quick eye of Beatrix noted instantly. The big flower-pots of old Gien stood in a row, empty, under the hall-table, and that massive piece of furniture was no longer strewn with cards and notes. A London Directory, an ugly wire construction for "Post" and "Delivery," a practical-looking slate, and a square basket containing neat bundles of tracts, with a card, legibly inscribed, "Please take a packet for distribution," replaced the mundane litter of Beatrix's time.

"New blinds," said Miss Chevenix to herself as she followed Mrs. Mabberley up the stairs, "and what hideous ones!"

Her introduction to Colonel and Mrs. Ramsden over, she had leisure to look about her, and to wonder at the altered aspect that the rooms, although every article was the same as it had been, now presented. She was not at all sentimental, and the change did not pain her, nor did she, as persons with more feeling than logic are inclined to do, resent any alteration at all in a place which might be supposed to have dear remembrances.

Beatrix merely wondered that anything so ugly as the green-and-yellow table-covers which Mrs. Ramsden had added to the plenishing, could have been designed by human invention; whether the colonel and his shrewd-looking wife held flowers to be sinful, and accordingly banished them, and what sort of people made up the Ramsden world. Very respectable, no doubt—judging from the samples that presented themselves in rapid succession, until a party of twelve was assembled—but profoundly uninteresting. The last person to enter the room was a young man, who was immediately presented to Beatrix as Mr. James Ramsden.

The son was an improvement on the father in point both of appearance and manners, for Colonel Ramsden struck Beatrix as being the very stiffest and old-fogiest individual she had ever met; with something in his air which she, with her quick perception of social "nuances," explained by the supposition that he had risen from the ranks. He was pompous, but he was not easy, and he occasionally used expressions and turns of phrase which, without being actually incorrect, were not customary.

Mr. Ramsden was well-looking, in a picturesque style. The sort of man who would go as a bull-fighter or a Spanish gipsy to a masquerade, thought Beatrix. And she found him amusing, though he did not know anyone whom she knew, and was not well versed in London topics.

Mrs. Ramsden was a dark, reserved, cold little woman of fifty, with furtive eyes and the hands of a housemaid. Her dress was expensive and ill-chosen.

The dinner was a good one, and it lasted long, to the satisfaction of Beatrix, who looked forward with dread to the ordeal of the drawing-room hour with five uninteresting women. She wondered whether they would cross-examine

her on religion, and talk of their favourite preachers.

It was so odd for her to be there, at a solemn dinner, with a solemn set of people, all eating and drinking with the most serious goodwill, in the same room that had been the scene of the charming little dinners for which Mr. Chevenix was famous: dinners in the style of that of the day before at the Townley Gores—gay, unconstrained, refined—the best people among the guests, and never a trace or suggestion of the unmannerly existence of black care.

What a perfect host Mr. Chevenix was in those days! The duns in the hall, of a morning, did not intrude themselves upon his remembrance in the evening; and, provided the best of everything made its appearance upon his table, it gave him no manner of concern when it should be paid for, or whether it was ever to be paid for at all.

Beatrix thought of these things while Mr. Ramsden talked to her about Italian opera and Spanish dancing, and she also, thought of the end of them. How right her father had been; how much he had enjoyed life; how cleverly he had cheated the enemy, ennui; and how precisely at the right time he had finished up with it all! Unfortunately, it could never be the same thing for a woman; the social system and her own dependence, her own nerves, place her at a great and unfair disadvantage. It must always be essential to a woman to feel secure.

An agreeable consciousness accompanied these thoughts. Security, which should be combined with other pleasant conditions of existence, was within the reach of Beatrix. She looked with disdain, carefully hidden under a gracious smile, at the young man by her side, under whose bold glance her colour did not rise, nor did her eyelids droop, and from the illuminated text above the sideboard to the solemn second-rate company, she thought complacently that, unless she had misinterpreted the words and looks of Mr. Horndean more completely than she had ever before misinterpreted words and looks, the hateful tie that bound her to Mrs. Mabberley might be broken almost as soon as she pleased.

It was at the moment of the move that she was most full of this consoling thought, and Mr. Ramsden had just picked up her fan and handed it to her, when she observed a quick questioning glance directed by Mrs. Mabberley to Colonel Ramsden, and

answered by him with an almost imperceptible nod. There was something strange in this, and Beatrix, for all her self-concentration, was so constantly constrained to think about the woman with whom she lived on terms of intimate dislike, that it turned her thoughts into another channel.

The look on the one side, the gesture on the other, implied a peculiar intimacy; and Beatrix wondered whether it was of the same nature as the intimacy that had subsisted between her father and Mrs. Mabberley. If it were, the parties invested their friendship with much reserve. That dread ordeal of the drawing-room was brief, and Beatrix employed the interval in tracing the once familiar articles of furniture and ornament to their perverted places and uses. She would have liked to go upstairs and look into her own old room, but Mrs. Ramsden was not a person to whom she could propose anything of that kind. She did stroll into the conservatory, but found it bare of flowers, half-lighted by one dim lamp, and invaded by rubbish. Some photographer's apparatus, and a box huddled up in green baize, occupied the neat shelf which had been devoted to Beatrix's favourite ferns. As she came out of the conservatory, the gentlemen entered the drawing-room, and she was immediately joined by Mr. Ramsden.

"I fear you must think us sad Goths; my mother does not care for flowers. You love them?"

"Passionately. I could not live without flowers."

"You will enjoy the gardens at Horndean. Mrs. Mabberley has been saying that you are going there."

"Do you know Horndean?" she asked quickly.

"I have seen the place; the gardens are good, and well kept."

Beatrix felt vaguely curious. When had Mr. Ramsden seen Horndean? Mrs. Townley Gore knew nothing of the Ramsdens. Did Mr. Horndean? She would have asked a question on the point, but at that moment a general movement was perceptible. What did it mean? Prayers, perhaps, thought Beatrix; the servants were moving tables and arranging lights. "The colonel will treat us to an exposition and an outpouring. Too bad of Mrs. Mabberley to put me in for that sort of thing." Her fears were unfounded, but she could hardly believe her eyes when the meaning of the movement was made clear, and the whole party, with the excep-

tion of Mr. Ramsden and herself, sat down to play cards in very serious earnest.

"You look amazed, Miss Chevenix," said Mr. Ramsden; "you did not expect to see 'the devil's picture-books' in this house?"

A touch of familiarity in his tone annoyed Beatrix, and she answered haughtily:

"I formed no expectations whatsoever about this house, Mr. Ramsden."

"And yet you might easily have supposed us to be too pious for card-playing."

"Neither did I trouble myself about the piety of its inmates."

"I have the misfortune to displease you by my remarks," said Mr. Ramsden, with a sudden change of his manner to distant respect. "Will you permit me to atone by my one poor accomplishment? I know you love music—and when they are at cards nothing ever disturbs them."

He opened the piano without waiting for her reply, and in a few minutes had won Beatrix from her ill-humour, by playing and singing in a style that fairly enchanted her.

When the Ramsden family were alone, Mrs. Ramsden left the room without speaking, and the colonel and his son proceeded to comment on Mrs. Mabberley's fair friend. The tone of their remarks was free rather than refined, and the colonel used some expletives, apropos of what he took the young lady's temper to be, that hardly harmonised with the illuminated texts and the family reputation.

"It was a deuced clever thing of Mrs. Mabb., wasn't it?" said the young man, whom Beatrix had impressed as much by her insolence as by her beauty.

"I don't say it wasn't; but, mark me, it was a deuced dangerous thing, too. That handsome minx is too clever to be safe, with her eyes shut."

With this enigmatical utterance the colonel withdrew to his private meditations and the consumption of a good deal of brandy and water; and the young man let himself quietly out of the street-door, and went off to more congenial scenes.

"I wish to say a few words to you tonight," said Mrs. Mabberley, when she and Beatrix were in the hall at Hill Street. She led the way into the small back room on the ground-floor, in which this most exact of women transacted her business of all kinds.

"I am rather sleepy," said Beatrix, as she followed Mrs. Mabberley reluctantly.

"I shall not detain you. Will you not sit down?"

"No, thanks. It feels more like getting it over to stand."

She leaned on the back of an easy-chair, with her arms crossed, and both her face and figure expressed a fatigued indifference. Mrs. Mabberley went on, in her habitual low, slow tone, and with the customary imperturbable smile.

"I have not much reason to thank you for your concession to my wishes, Beatrix, but you cannot provoke me, though you are so foolish and shortsighted as to let your temper continually tempt you into trying to do so. It does not suit me, my dear, and you cannot suppose that I should allow a girl like you to induce me to do anything that would not suit me. You did not behave at all nicely this evening." She pretended to be totally unconscious of the start of indignation with which Beatrix heard her, and the angry flush in her face at this calm assumption of superior manners. "And I have no doubt you made a very unfavourable impression——"

Beatrix interrupted her with a scornful laugh.

"The great affair," she said, "to make a favourable impression on people like those!"

"They are all a good deal more important than you are. But we will let that pass. There will be no need for you to make any other such exhibition of your taste and your breeding. My purpose in taking you to the Ramsdens has been effected; you will not have to go there again."

"So much the better; it does not 'suit me,' as you say. I am sure I cannot imagine what your purpose was."

"No? It is not at all necessary that you should; and we will, if you please, drop the subject. I wanted to say to you to-night that you will have to limit your stay at Horndean to three weeks, as I wish you to accept Lady Vane's invitation for October. That is a house at which it may be of great advantage to you to visit."

Beatrix sullenly signified her acqui-

escence. She did not say a word to Mrs. Mabberley of what was in her thoughts; it formed no part of their compact that she should do so.

"You will write at once to Lady Vane, accepting her invitation, and remember that I shall like to know of whom her party will consist."

"Lest they might not suit you?"

"My dear Beatrix, your sarcasm is silly. Precisely so; lest they might not suit me. And now, I will detain you no longer, but say good-night, adding a bit of news that will please you. Your new maid will be here the day after to-morrow."

"Oh!" said Beatrix shortly, and that was all she said.

Mr. Frank Lisle tired of London after a short sojourn, and as he had visions of the very earliest of the autumnal tints at Horndean, and was in haste to realise them, he went back there a few days after the little dinner. His friend was left to the task of attendance upon his sister, in which Mr. Horndean had suddenly become laudably assiduous, and to the enjoyment of a good deal of Miss Chevenix's society.

"Frederick has fallen in love with that handsome selfish young woman," said Mr. Lisle to himself, as he watched the flying miles of brick and mortar that stretched far ahead, before he could hope for the country tints and forms that he loved, "rather more expeditiously than I have yet seen him perform the same feat. He can afford to marry now, and so I suppose he will marry her before the fit is over. It is, then, only to be hoped that the fit may last. Mrs. T. G. means it, I should think, or she would not throw them together in the way she has done. Here's the first lane on this side town, and there's a real cottage, a tree with a brown trunk instead of a black one, and the indispensable bit of red supplied by a flannel shirt drying on a line. There's neat-handed Phyllis too, washing the greens. How do you do, my dear? What a pity we are going thirty miles an hour!"

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“A BARROW OF PRIMROSES.”

BY “RITA.”

CHAPTER I. HOW THE ROMANCE BEGAN.

CHANCERY LANE is not a very likely spot for a romance to have its beginning. There is no poetry about it. It is a long, unsightly, dreary street, filled at certain times of the day with noise and bustle enough, as white-wigged barristers hurry along the narrow pavement, their hands filled with briefs and law-papers, or business men run down on their way to Fleet Street, or the traffic of carts, and cabs, and omnibuses, and such plebeian vehicles, wend along to the wider thoroughfares beyond.

A group of barristers were standing one spring morning under the gloomy archway leading to Lincoln's Inn. They were wigged and gowned, and talking eagerly together of some case of peculiar interest which was occupying the public mind.

“Here comes Heron Archer,” exclaimed one of the group. “Looks as if he had a power of work on hand, doesn't he?”

The young man alluded to was walking leisurely along. He saw the little knot of talkers, and recognising two with a careless nod was about to pass by.

“Stay, Archer,” cried one. “Have you heard how Cray v. Wood is going on? Your friend has not a leg to stand on.”

“Have you turned him into a Greenwich pensioner already?” asked Archer with a smile, as he paused beside the man who had addressed him. Heron Archer was

a tall well-built young fellow of some six-and-twenty years, with nothing very remarkable about him save his powerful figure and a certain good-humoured expression of calmness and determination about the face. The clear grey eyes and short-cut hair and drooping moustache were just the characteristics of many an Englishman, and it is probable that in a crowd no one would have thought of singling him out as being in any way better-looking or more remarkable than his fellow-men.

Yet he was so unlike most of his friends and associates as to have won the appellation of “eccentric,” and almost everyone who knew him declared there was something about the young man odd and Quixotic, and clever though he was, a queer fellow enough all the same.

Even now, as he stood listening to the chatter of his friends, his eyes were roving to a barrow heaped up with masses of sweet pale primroses, and then to the face of the boy selling them, and while he appeared to be listening to the intricacies of Cray v. Wood his thoughts were speculating as to how many of those bunches the boy would sell in such an unlikely locality as this, where men had no leisure to listen to Nature's messages sent from mossy banks and dim green woods, but thought only of work and money-getting.

“You should have heard Puffins's speech,” said Herbert Gray, a rising young barrister. “It was first-rate—the neatest thing I ever listened to. There can be no question as to the issue of the case now. I wish you

had been in court. You are such an idle dog. Why, bless the man!" he exclaimed in amazement, "where's he run off to? I—by Jove!—the boy's down!"

"What a plucky thing!—see, he's got him out!" exclaimed the aroused Puffins.

"See how that horse is kicking—he can't hold him. Let's go and help." And regardless of dignity and wigs the four friends rushed to the scene of the accident.

How had it occurred? How do street accidents ever occur? It was all so quick—so sudden. The boy had been standing by his barrow a moment before, a subject of speculation to Heron Archer's wandering thoughts. Someone had beckoned him across the street. Without looking right or left he darted across, and the next instant was lying under the hoofs of a horse. Quick as lightning Heron Archer had seen the danger and rushed to the rescue. His strong hand was on the reins. He forced the animal back on its haunches, to the imminent danger of occasioning a new catastrophe by the upsetting of the hansom cab to which it belonged, and the boy slipped like an eel through the plunging hoofs, and was safe on the pavement ere anyone could recover presence of mind enough to give assistance. So far well. But the hansom cab had an occupant, and that occupant was a lady. When the horse was released it showed many signs of ill-temper at the treatment it had received, and reared and snorted and shook its head, and altogether behaved in a manner quite unbecoming a well-broken London cab horse. Perhaps he was new to the business.

The lady became alarmed. She appealed to Heron Archer. "Ask the man to stop," she cried. "This is a horrible animal. I have been frightened to death all the time I have been in the cab."

Her face was very pale. Two frightened eyes met the calm glance of the young barrister. He needed no second bidding.

"Stop," he said sternly to the man. "You are a very careless driver. You had no business to come dashing down a street like this at the rate I saw you!"

The man made some sulky rejoinder, but he stopped his steed at that peremptory order, and Heron Archer assisted the lady to alight. She trembled very much.

"Allow me to pay the man," he said gently, then sternly demanded the fare and settled it with another caution against such driving as had occasioned the catastrophe.

He then turned to his companion. She

looked better now; the colour was returning to her cheeks.

"Thank you so much," she said gratefully, as she handed him the money he had paid. "Where is the boy? I am so sorry. I do hope he is not hurt."

"He is over there," said her companion, pointing to where the hero of the event was already the centre of a sympathising and admiring crowd.

"I should so like to speak to him—to know he is not hurt," she said eagerly.

"I will bring him over here," said Heron Archer. "The crowd is dispersing, you see. Ah! there comes a policeman now he is not wanted."

He crossed over to the boy.

"The lady wants to speak to you. She is afraid you were hurt," he said.

"No, sir, not a bit, thanks to you," said the lad gratefully. "I don't believe I've got so much as a bruise."

The crowd began to melt away as suddenly as it had arisen.

The lad, with the dust and mud of the road on his torn clothes and bare arms and face, looked anything but an inviting object, but the lady's face was full of sweet compassion and sympathy as she questioned him and heard, in course of time, many more of the events and troubles of his life than that one accident.

She got his address and bought as many of his primroses as would fill her basket, and paid him treble the value of her purchase.

Then cutting short his thanks and blessings she turned to the spectator of her gentle charity, and with a grave bow was about to pass on. But Heron Archer was not so minded.

"Pardon me," he said abruptly. "This is a rough neighbourhood for a lady. Can I be of any further assistance to you?"

"No; I thank you," she said graciously but firmly. "I know my way, I am close to Lincoln's Inn Fields, and I shall meet my father there."

He could not say more. He would have given anything to have detained her—to have heard the sweet low voice—to have gazed again into the soft shy eyes, but he had no pretext to delay her. He could but return her bow and watch the graceful figure vanish through the gloomy archway, taking with it—for him—all the sunshine and brightness of the young spring day.

That was how the romance began.

Heron Archer went back to his chambers

in the Temple, and then sat himself down and tried to bring his mind to the work he had to do, but surely no work in the legal profession entails the perpetual drawing, on every available sheet of paper, of a fair girlish profile, which was the sole use of time, fingers, and brains that Heron Archer made that morning. And none of the drawings satisfied him. He tore them all up in disgust at last—all, save one sketch, which displeased him less than the others. That one he locked away in a drawer of his writing-table, and then in a most unsettled frame of mind he put on his hat and went out to get some lunch.

"I wonder if I shall ever see her again?" he thought impatiently.

It was strange for a face to haunt him so. He was not a man who held women of much account, or ever troubled his head about them; but now, suddenly, he could not put this pale sweet face out of his mind, or cease to hear the echo of that low musical voice. The voice in especial had pleased his rather exacting fancy, for if he had one weakness it was for a perfect sweet-toned woman's voice, and he had never heard one like this.

How it lingered on his ear all through that day! How many times he found himself gazing into vacancy, wrapped in a vague dream, yet always having that same soft music floating through the mists of imagination and thrilling his whole soul with its spell!

"Pooh, this is all nonsense, I shall forget her to-morrow," he said with angry impatience, as he sought his couch that night. He had forgotten other women so easily—had cared for them so lightly, why should it not be the same now? Why? Well, he could not answer that question; he only knew as to-morrow, and yet to-morrow passed on, and days came and went, and the busy hum and stir of life was about him, and he did his usual work, and tried to appear his usual self, that there was a difference somewhere in it all.

Nothing was the same quite. The flavour had gone out of life, and it was dull, insipid, commonplace.

One evening he bethought himself suddenly of the barrow of primroses, and remembered also that he had the boy's address. He resolved to go and see him; perhaps the girl had already done so; he might hear of her, learn where she lived. The thought was delightful. He put it into execution without loss of time.

It was about six o'clock when he left his

chambers and went on his errand. Such visits were nothing new to him. He had a score of poor pensioners on his bounty, and did more good in his quiet unostentatious fashion than many a millionaire with his pompous donations. For there is so much more in charity than mere money—than the actual momentary relief of bodily necessities. A kind word, a token of sympathy, a smile of encouragement, an outspoken appreciation of manly efforts to fight against the ills and temptations of life—all these which cost so little to the giver, linger longer in the mind of the recipient than the gold which is pompously offered and considered as more than equivalent for any other expression of sympathy.

After half-an-hour's walking he found the court he was in search of. It was dark and foul, and full of miserable tenements, at one of which he paused and knocked.

A thin slatternly woman came to the door.

"Does Jack Murphy live here?" he asked.

"Yes," answered the woman, surveying her visitor with evident surprise.

"Is he in?—can I see him?" he continued.

The woman regarded him doubtfully.

"The lad hasn't been doing anything wrong, has he?" she questioned anxiously; "or maybe you're one of them School Board chaps agin."

"No," he said with his pleasant smile. "Both your suppositions are wrong. I only want to see if Jack has got over the effects of his accident the other day. Are you his mother?"

"Yes. Are you the gentleman he told me of, who kept the horse from running over him?" she exclaimed with sudden eagerness.

"Yes."

"Oh, come in, sir, pray, if you do not mind our poor room. Jack has always been talking of you. He's all right, not a bit hurt. My! won't he be glad to see you!"

Heron Archer followed her into the close dark room at once. He was accounted a fastidious man, and one whose artistic taste was rarely at fault, but there was no sign of disgust in his face, as his eyes roved over the dirt and disorder around, and people who declared they hardly dared invite him to their tasteless, inartistic rooms for fear of his cynical criticism, would have stared at him in amazement now.

The place seemed full of children, of all

ages and sizes, and in various stages of dirt and raggedness. There was nothing around that was not wretched and hideous and unsightly, but Heron Archer spoke pleasantly to the wondering urchins, and seated himself on the rickety chair by the fireplace, and made himself so at home that they stood and gazed in wondering admiration, and Mrs. Murphy herself forgot to blush for her own neglect and untidiness. Heron Archer learned all about the family. The father worked as compositor at a printing-office in Fleet Street; Jack, the eldest, a lad of thirteen, sold flowers and fruit in the streets; the intermediate-aged children went to school; the younger ones tumbled about in the dirty court at home. There was nothing pathetic or sad in the story, it was only one very commonplace, very dreary, and very often to be heard; hundreds and thousands, in the great city and its suburbs, lived similar lives, shared similar fates, told similar stories. Heron Archer knew that well.

These people had a roof to shelter them and enough food for the many mouths—that was enough for them. They drudged on in an aimless, indifferent fashion. They were neither happy nor wretched, neither discontented nor the reverse, yet somehow the utter barrenness and unloveliness of such an existence seemed to Heron Archer a more pitiable fate than the sharpness of utter poverty; the pathos of a bitter struggle.

There was nothing to do here, nothing to relieve, nothing to comfort. "They were well enough," the woman said.

Well enough! No wonder the visitor sighed, thinking how hopeless it seemed to urge her to make things a little better: to give cleanliness and tidiness to the home and neatness to the children, and not believe that prodigal wastefulness one day, and stint and deprivation at other times, was good management. However, he was too wise to urge anything at present. He sat there and chatted with them all, and made friends even with the dirty crying baby, and yet he could not summon up courage to ask Jack that one question burning on his tongue. He rose at last to go, and his eye fell upon a large bowl of primroses in the window. He bent over them for a moment.

"Have you ever seen that lady again?" he asked abruptly, with a curious wonder that his heart should throb in so odd a fashion, as he waited for the answer.

"Oh yes, sir!" exclaimed Jack eagerly. "She came round here the very next day. So kind she was too, and gave mother half-a-sovereign to buy some clothes for the baby, and spoke so nice to me, and wanted to know if she could do anything for me. I told her as how I should like to be errand-boy in a shop, and she said she would speak to her father about me; and I'm sure she won't forget, though she do seem a grand lady and was dressed so beautiful, and had lots of gold money in her purse."

"She told you her name, I suppose?" questions the visitor with well-assumed carelessness.

"No, sir; she didn't."

"Nor where she lived?"

"No, sir."

Heron Archer feels as if the world had grown suddenly dark and empty again. He takes leave of the family, and with a bunch of primroses in his hand (the pretty yellow flowers seem always associated now with her), goes away through the noisy dirty court, and so home to his chambers once more.

Charity had brought him no reward this time!

CHAPTER II. AN ECCENTRIC RESOLUTION.

ANOTHER week went by, but, despite the press of business and the fact that he was at last retained on a great and important case, Heron Archer could not get this fancy out of his mind.

That fair sweet face floated for ever before his eyes and haunted his dreams. Such an experience was new to his life, and perplexed and worried him accordingly. He heard no more and saw no more of the girl, and gradually began to think it unlikely he should do so.

One evening, just as he was putting aside his papers and thinking of leaving off work for the day, a note was brought to him by a little ragged urchin. It contained a few hastily-scrawled lines, but they evidently gave him deep concern, for he put on his hat, locked his room, and went out at once.

He hailed the first passing hansom and was driven rapidly to the north-west of London. In a small mean-looking street of this district he alighted and dismissed the cab. A few steps up the street brought him to the house he sought.

A moment later, and he was bending over a slight young figure lying on a couch

in a poor, ill-furnished room. In one corner stood a piano littered over with music, and the instrument, though plain, was solid and good of its kind, and looked singularly out of place among the shabby furniture of the room.

"So you are ill; suffering again," said Heron Archer gently, as he bent over the young man. "I am sorry to hear it."

The pale wan face lit up brightly at sight of the welcome visitor; the young man made an effort to rise, but sank back directly, while a violent fit of coughing shook him from head to foot.

The strong man by his side looked with inexpressible compassion at the slight figure, the thin pale face, and delicate attenuated features.

"Hush! lie still," he said. "I see what it is; you have caught fresh cold again. You must take care of yourself for a day or two. You will be all right again then. What is it I can do for you?"

"It is so vexatious, so unfortunate," said the invalid faintly. "I had such a good engagement for to-night, and up to an hour ago I was in hopes I should be able to keep it. But I see it is no use. I wrote to you, I thought you might help me. I tried to get a deputy, and could not. I was to have two guineas. It is such a loss to me. But perhaps you know someone who can take my place; only it is such short notice. At nine is the ball."

"What ball? Where?"

"It is a private subscription-ball, and takes place at the Marlborough Rooms, not far from here. I was to play the piano. There are three other musicians—cornet, violin, and double-bass. It is most unfortunate. Someone must be got."

"Well, I'll see what I can do for you," said Heron Archer cheerfully. "And you shan't lose the two guineas if I can help it. Is this the music?"

"Yes; it's mostly waltzes. I have played with these men before. They are good fellows, and we get on very well. I know they'll be sorry for me."

"There's not much time certainly," said Heron Archer, looking at his watch. "Do you know what I've been thinking, Staunton? I'll take your place myself."

"You, sir!" and the young fellow raised himself up on his elbow, and stared at his visitor as if he thought he had suddenly taken leave of his senses.

"Yes, I," laughed Heron Archer amusedly. "Why not? I play fairly well, and there really seems no time to get

a substitute, even if I knew of one—which I don't."

"Oh sir, you cannot do such a thing; it is impossible!" cried the youth. "I wish I had let you know earlier. It is not fair to give you all this trouble; you have been always much too good to me as it is. My life is one long debt to you."

"Nonsense, I have done little enough," exclaimed Heron Archer, looking sadly at the wasted form and delicate features before him.

In his heart he knew how little benefit could be done him; how short a span of life remained for the troubles and perplexities of earth.

There was a moment's silence. Then Heron Archer broke it abruptly.

"Come," he said, "I have made up my mind; I shall like the duty immensely. You know I am fond of masquerading. This will be a new character to come out in. Give me the address."

"You are only joking, sir, surely," pleaded the young man. "Supposing anyone you know happened to be at the ball?"

"There is no chance of that. I know no one in this neighbourhood; even if I was recognised I should not care. It would only be one eccentricity the more for my friends to chronicle."

The invalid looked admiringly up at the handsome determined face.

"Your acts of eccentricity are all noble and generous," he murmured. "How few of your friends know you really as you are."

"It is just as well they do not," said Heron Archer lightly. "No man bears being turned inside out, you know. There is always a little something about ourselves which we like to keep dark. But we are wasting time. It gets late, and I must go home and don my evening dress. Where do we sit—in a gallery?"

"No; there is a platform, I believe."

"Whew-w! Then the guests have a full view of us!"

"Yes. Pray don't carry out your words, sir. Supposing anything happened that might make you regret it!"

Heron Archer laughed. "Just as if anything could," he said lightly. "Nonsense, Staunton; my mind is made up. It will be great fun, and I shall come round to-morrow and bring your two guineas with me. If I got you a deputy now you would be a loser by the transaction."

"I would rather lose it twenty times

over, sir, than that you should repent your determination of to-night."

"I shall not repent it," laughed the young barrister good-humouredly. "Good-bye, now, and go to bed and rest yourself. I shall ask Dr. Leigh to look in to-morrow."

And without waiting to hear the grateful thanks the invalid would have uttered, he hurried swiftly from the room.

All throughout his drive home Heron Archer never gave a serious thought to his eccentric scheme; it was a good joke, he thought, and it would benefit his poor consumptive protégé, in whom he had felt a most unusual interest for years past. As to anything awkward or unpleasant accruing to himself from such an act, it was a probability that never crossed his mind. He was accustomed to do strange things, and very rarely even troubled himself to give an explanation of them. People had grown accustomed to his ways by this time, and ceased to wonder when anything eccentric or startling reached their ears.

"He is the worst man possible for the legal profession," argued his friends. "He never cares two straws for his own interests."

But Heron Archer paid no heed, and went on still in his own way. So it was no wonder that friends and acquaintances gave up wondering at him and arguing with him at last, and suffered him to take it unmolested.

That was just what he wanted. It is a thing many men want, and never get.

A large lofty hall, prettily decorated with flowers and plants; a smooth, well-polished floor, looking very inviting to lovers of dancing; a general sense of space and emptiness, and brilliant lights reflected back by numerous mirrors: this was the scene that met Heron Archer's eyes as he entered the Marlborough Rooms. He had explained to the other musicians that young Staunton was too ill to come, and he had been sent as deputy; and though they had regarded him with evident wonder, and treated him with a certain sullen deference as one plainly superior to themselves, he yet in no way assumed any airs of superiority, or for one moment allowed them to perceive he was in any way different to what he represented himself.

The people began to arrive at last in large numbers. Heron Archer sat there at the piano, and watched them with a certain amused indifference. Presently one of the masters of ceremonies advanced and ordered

the band to play a waltz, and while his fingers struck the notes and his powerful rhythmic touch brought out the full sweet melody, the pianist's eyes roved carelessly from group to group of the moving, floating figures, and he was conscious that life still held for him a new sensation.

Dance after dance followed now. Heron Archer looked less at the dancers and more at his music, though his thoughts were far enough away from either, and his fingers only did their work with mechanical precision. It must have been nearly eleven o'clock, when he suddenly stood up to reach a set of Lancers lying on a chair on the platform. As he turned back to his seat, his eyes fell on a group just forming into the figure at his end of the room. He started as if a pistol-shot had struck him. There, in the full brilliance of the lights—there, facing him a few yards distant, stood the object of his search, his thoughts, his dreams, these two weeks past! She was talking to her partner, and her face was flushed and slightly turned away from the platform. With a strong effort Heron Archer recovered himself, and then, as he once more took his seat, the full sense of what his eccentric action might cost him burst upon his mind. Suppose she saw him, recognised him; what would she think? He could have groaned aloud as he thought of this, as he saw the barrier he had raised between them, and knew that now, though she was so near, he dared not give one sign of recognition or seek her side, despite his frenzied longing.

His one hope now was that she might not recognise him, and yet that was a chance he hardly dared count on. The platform was raised some feet from the hall, and he was the most prominent of all the players. The set in which the girl was dancing was close to the platform, and she herself stood directly facing him. At any moment she might raise her eyes—see him—and then? He dared not dwell on the humiliation such a recognition would bring. He only prayed she might not think of looking at the platform. He tried to avert his eyes, but every moment they stole a glance at that couple. How he envied the man who danced with her! How he cursed the fate that held him here, chained to a hateful penance, while any of the careless vapid throng below were free to win her smiles and seek her hand in the dance! The signal was given, the music struck up. Mechanically he played the selection from Carmen before him, and uselessly he strove

to keep his face turned away from that one set in the room below.

But in vain. Despite his efforts, his resolves, his eyes would turn to that radiant, graceful figure, with her crown of sunny hair and snowy floating robes. She was standing still while the sides were going through their evolutions. Her eyes roved carelessly around—before—then up. Heron Archer should have turned away, but he was not able to do so. Like some spell, those eyes met and held his own, and across the distance that separated them flashed one lightning glance of mutual recognition. That she remembered him he could doubt no longer, for a burning wave of colour swept up to her brow, and the startled glance told its own tale.

His heart beat high despite the pain and humiliation that oppressed him. At least she had not forgotten him. That thought was sweet beyond all others, though he gave her no sign, and kept his head turned resolutely away for the rest of the dance.

When it was over, the various couples began to promenade round the room. Heron Archer followed that slight figure with anxious, watchful eyes. She did not make the circle of the room, but passed out with her partner through a door leading to the refreshment-room. With beating heart and eager gaze he watched for her reappearance. How he envied the man by her side; how he wondered what he was saying to her, or she to him! Then again came the summons to play, and as the plaintive waltz air rose and fell, he saw her again floating round the room to the melody his fingers gave forth.

The situation was torturing in the extreme, and as the hours went by and he saw her courted, besieged, surrounded, and met no further glance from her averted eyes, and could guess nothing of the shame burning in her young passionate heart, he felt that his self-imposed task grew each moment more hateful and irksome, that it was almost beyond his strength to carry it through.

But everything must have an end, and at last the final waltz was on the desk. How gladly he played it; what a welcome relief to feel each bar, each page brought him nearer to the conclusion of his unpalatable duty!

Then out crashed "God save the Queen," and he was free to go, free to return home and chew the cud of sweet and bitter fancies, and wish, with vain fierce wishes, that he had never placed

himself in so false a position. The money was in his hand, and with young Staunton's roll of music under his arm, he hurried out of the building. At the entrance a crowd of cabs and carriages were still waiting. He paused a moment. A vague hope that he might see her once more ere she left was in his mind. He saw a gentleman call a cab and then go back to the portico for two ladies, one elderly, and shawled and cloaked with great care; the other—yes, it was—the mysterious "she" who had so changed the calm and even tenour of his life. A mass of fleecy white lace was round her head and shoulders, her tiny gloved hand rested lightly on her companion's arm. Heron Archer drew his hat low over his brows, and strained his ears to catch the directions given to the cabman. "L— Street, Maida Vale."

Then a silvery voice said, "Good-bye. It has been a most delightful evening. So many thanks for the tickets," and the cab drove off.

That was all. Yet no, not quite all, for lying on the pavement, close to Heron Archer's feet, lay a little bouquet of faded primroses. They must have fallen from her dress as she stepped into the cab. He snatched them up as a miser might have snatched at gold. They were more precious than gold to him. He thrust them into his breast, and then, dizzy with confused hopes and thoughts and plans, he sprang into a hansom close by, and was driven rapidly home through the pale sweet dawn of the spring day.

CHAPTER III. HOW THE ROMANCE ENDED.

It would be impossible to describe the amount of self-tormenting which Heron Archer vigorously inflicted upon himself for the next few days. But he was too generous to let his invalid protégé know what his eccentric action had cost him, and so made light of his evening's adventure as he brought him the sum for which he had paid so dearly.

Yet the quick eye of the faithful youth soon discovered there was something amiss with his benefactor. Amidst his own pain and weariness he saw that there was gloom and shadow on the noble face he loved, and it distressed him. Heron Archer was wont to be as calm and cheerful as only frank, honest, and untroubled natures can be, and he was not hypocrite enough to hide his uneasiness successfully.

"I knew you would repent it; I felt

certain of it," said the invalid, looking sadly up at his friend's face, for friend indeed had Heron Archer been to him in the truest sense of that much misused word. "You saw someone who knew you; it has troubled you; am I not right?"

Heron Archer looked away from the eager questioning face. "Yes," he said at last, "I did see someone; but it is no matter; there is no harm done that need vex you."

"What troubles you is my trouble also," answered the young man sadly. "I have no other friend in the world save yourself, and it would be strange indeed if my heart were not grateful for all the benefits you have bestowed on me."

Heron Archer silenced him with an impatient gesture. He hated thanks or unspoken gratitude, and would have always avoided them had it been possible.

That evening the longing that had been in his heart through all these weary days since he had known where she lived—the longing to go himself to the street and trust to chance for another glimpse of her—came over him so strongly that he at last resolved to yield to it. He took the train to Edgware Road, and from there walked over to Maida Vale. He knew nothing of the neighbourhood, but by dint of searching and enquiries he found the street he wished at last; then so strange a reluctance came over him to traverse it that he was very nearly turning back without even setting foot within it.

While he still stood, looking with longing eyes down the street, yet not daring to venture through it, the door of one of the villas near was opened; a slight young figure came down the steps, and in another second he was face to face with the object of his thoughts.

He started and coloured furiously. The girl gave him one rapid glance and then passed on. It was a moment into which the emotions and experiences of years seemed crowded. After a short indecision Heron Archer grew desperate. She was still in view, hurrying along up the road he had just traversed, and forthwith he started off in pursuit. A few moments brought him to her side. She moved close to the wall, as if for him to pass; perhaps she guessed to whom those eager hurrying feet belonged.

Heron Archer hesitated, passed, looked back. Then, with the courage of despair, he raised his hat and spoke abruptly.

"Pardon me, I pray, but I have sought you so long. I—I have so much to explain.

Do give me the favour of a few words with you."

She drew herself up with sudden stately hauteur.

"Sir!" she said quickly, "you have spoken more than a few words already. There can be nothing for you to explain which concerns me. Allow me to pass."

"I cannot. I will not. You must hear me!" he cried passionately, forgetting all prudence and reason in the fear that she might leave him now. "You think me other than I am. It was all a mistake. I can explain it—only listen."

She grew very pale.

"I have made a mistake," she said scornfully. "I took you for a gentleman—once. If I had need of proof to convince me of my error your conduct to-night has given it to me. Once more will you allow me to pass, or must I return home for protection?"

The bronzed and manly face before her grew pale as death—his eyes looked at her with unspeakable reproach, but to such words there could be but one answer. He took off his hat and stepped aside, such shame and agony, and humiliation in his heart as would have touched her now with an infinite compassion could she have read its meaning and its cause.

But she passed on without a look or word, yet in her own mind she seemed suddenly to feel what a poor and pitiful thing her pride was.

Heron Archer went home, his heart full of bitterness, yet aching with a fierce unsatisfied longing that had never been his lot before.

"It is no use. I can never set things straight in her eyes," he thought to himself. "I must try and forget her."

How hard he tried, and how equally futile his efforts were, he alone knew. For love was never yet conquered by trying, if indeed it is love worth calling by the name.

He worked hard, and began to find his talents recognised, and to take a more prominent position in his profession than had yet been his lot. Yet even now the man's innate conscientiousness and impatience of the petty hypothesises and simulations of all business life began to threaten his promised success.

One evening, at a dinner-party given by an eminent member of the legal profession, he made a speech that so overthrew all conventional rules and doctrines of legal

life as to array his colleagues in indignant opposition against his boldly-hazarded views.

"Allow solicitors to plead in court!" exclaimed an eminent Q.C. "Why, Archer, you must be mad! Such a thing is unheard of! It goes against all the tenets of our profession. You surely don't mean what you say?"

"Indeed I do," was the calm rejoinder. "There is a prejudice against the idea, I know, but the generality of people who are not barristers think, and agree, that it is most desirable. Solicitors know their own cases much better than we do, and their information on legal points and technicalities is quite as correct. It is my opinion that ere long the present course of things will be quite changed."

"You are a traitor to your order!" smiled the great man good-humouredly.

He still thought it a joke. No member of the legal profession in his sane mind (except a solicitor) would have put forward such a startling opinion.

"You are cutting your own throat by advocating such heresy, Archer," said one of his companions, also a barrister. "Where would we be if your view of the case were taken and acted upon? Things are bad enough as it is, but we should be reduced to bread and cheese at that rate."

"No bad fare when we purchase it with clean hands and clear consciences," remarked the young man.

"It might suit you; besides, you have other means. You are not solely dependent on what you make. But as for me—No, thank you. Social martyrdom is not in my line. Human nature is all more or less selfish; I lay no claim to exemption from that one great fault. As for you, Don Quixote and his windmills are nothing to the way in which you persistently fight against prejudice and impossibility."

Heron Archer laughed.

"You are wrong," he said; "I do not fight against impossibilities. I am wiser than that. But my warfare is very nearly as useless as if I did. There is nothing so stubborn as established rules, so impracticable as prejudice."

"Why not leave them alone and take life as it is?" asked his friend. "You would be much more comfortable, and so should we. It is so much pleasanter to walk along the path of custom blindfold than to have the bandage snatched from your eyes and be told: 'See, your path is full of holes and pitfalls, and your way lies

beside a hundred precipices, and all behind you is misery and all before you danger! That is the sort of thing you do, Archer."

"Well, I would rather suffer any hardship than know I was doing harm to others, or pursue blindfold a path that was strown with victims to the Juggernaut of false custom," answered Heron Archer. "I like to have my eyes unbandaged, to see my way clear before me; to know where each footstep leads, and to what each motion tends."

"What a restless, unhappy being you must be, then," laughed the other. "I would not change consciences with you for something, old boy! But, now, a truce to these grave subjects. I have something to tell you. Do you remember one day, some months ago now, when you rushed under a horse's hoofs to save a lad who was selling primroses?"

"Yes," exclaimed Heron Archer eagerly, as he set down the glass he had been in the act of raising to his lips.

"Well, then, I daresay you have not forgotten the lady who was in the hansom?"

"What of her?" asked the young man with well-assumed indifference, though his heart throbbed wildly at the mere mention of the idol of his dream.

"It's a curious thing," said the other who was no less a personage than the renowned Puffins. "But, to begin at the beginning, I was asked out a few nights ago to an 'At home' given by Mrs. Trafford. Well, her rooms were crowded as usual, and among the guests was a young lady who sang divinely. I begged the favour of an introduction. We bowed—looked at each other, and behold, it was the heroine of the hansom! Eh—did you speak?"

Heron Archer's face was averted, his glass was lifted to his lips, but Mr. Puffins certainly thought he had caught an exclamation not quite saintly from his friend's lips. However, he proceeded:

"She was as charming as her singing. We became great friends. I recalled to her mind the incident of the primroses. She remembered it quite well, but seemed embarrassed at the mention of the occurrence, so I changed the subject. I was introduced to her father—queer old chap—always going to law about something or other. I received an invitation to their house, and am going there to-morrow. What do you say to that?"

What Heron Archer thought of it was

more to the purpose, but he did not acknowledge that, and changed the subject with what speed he could. Certainly Fate was against him, for here was this empty-headed prattler suddenly put forward into the very place he so coveted, and that without an effort or desire to force circumstances to his will, while for himself was no hope of such good fortune.

As soon as dinner was over he took his leave, regardless of the fact that by so doing he was universally voted more unsocial and eccentric than ever. All that evening he passed his time in solitary musing and bitter regrets, inveighing against his luck in a manner the reverse of philosophical.

Early next morning, as he was busily engaged with his papers, a knock came at his office-door, and in answer to his permission, in rushed Puffins.

"Look here; never say I don't do you a good turn!" exclaimed that voluble pleader. "I got this letter this morning, and I thought of you immediately. See, I've brought it on at once!"

"Is it another case?" questioned Archer coolly.

"Case? Well, I don't know about that. It depends on yourself I should say," answered little Puffins, laughing over his joke. "Read it for yourself."

Heron Archer took the pretty little feminine note held out to him and began reading it with careless indifference. At the first line, however, he started and flushed nervously up to the very roots of his hair. Puffins watched him with no small amusement. His keen eyes had detected something the night before; his suspicions became certainty now as he observed the young barrister's evident agitation.

This was what Heron Archer read:

"DEAR MR. PUFFINS,—As we intend having a carpet-dance to-night after the music, I write to ask you if you will kindly bring a friend with you. We are rather short of gentlemen.

"With kind regards, very truly yours,
"DORA MORISON."

Heron Archer laid down the letter and looked up at his friend's face.

"Well!" he said with assumed carelessness.

"Well!" mimicked Puffins. "And is that all your gratitude? Aren't you pleased at the chance of seeing your 'handsome heroine' again? Don't you care to come?"

"I should like to very much," answered Heron Archer slowly, "but—"

"Now don't pull any of your conscientious scruples in by the forelock," laughed Puffins. "It's all right. You're mutually interested in each other—renewal of acquaintance; topics of conversation, primroses and hansom horses, services rendered, gratitude, etc. etc. There's the case plainly stated. The concluding points I leave to you. Good morning; eight sharp; I shall be here."

Then he was gone, noisy and voluble to the last. But Heron Archer did little work that day, only young Staunton was astonished by the receipt of a five-pound note sent him anonymously, and posted in the S.E. district of London.

It was there that Heron Archer's restlessness first had taken him, for his mind was too unsettled and perplexed to allow of his sitting in his chambers. "Would she be offended?" he thought. "She must hear his explanation now—and then!"

Well, then he dared not pursue the subject any farther. Fate must settle it for him in the time to come.

At eight sharp, even as he had said, Puffins drove up to his friend's chambers in a hansom. Heron Archer had been ready since seven, but naturally he did not inform the lively barrister of that fact.

He was strangely nervous and agitated, though he strove to hide it by an unusual amount of coolness and indifference; and when he reached the house, and was ushered into the drawing-room, and heard his name announced in conjunction with that of Puffins, he absolutely trembled at his own temerity.

A moment, and a fair white-robed figure stood before him, and his low bow and appealing look were met by a half-timid apologetic glance that filled his heart with wonder. He heard Puffins's introduction, and was conscious of being extolled as "a shining light in my own profession" by that well-intentioned individual, but her smile and glance were too much for his dazzled senses. The whole room seemed to swim round him, and he could find no words in which to answer her greeting.

With ready tact the young hostess drew the talkative Puffins away, and introduced him to a lady by whose side was a vacant chair. Then, to Heron Archer's amazement, she came to him again—a deepening flush on her cheek, a timid, shy anxiety in the eyes that had looked so proud and cold at their last meeting.

Proud and cold?—ah, surely not!—there was no such look within them now.

“I have an old acquaintance of yours to introduce you to, Mr. Archer,” she said bashfully; “will you come with me?”

Like one in a dream he followed. Indeed, it seemed to him that this must all be a dream—that on some cold desolate to-morrow he would awake and find himself back in his chambers once more, feel in his now throbbing heart the old fierce gnawing pain of that sudden and hopeless love of his.

She paused beside the piano, and there sat young Staunton, a radiant contented look on his face, such as had not rested there for many a long day!

“There is no need to introduce you, I see,” she said smiling, and Heron Archer, in whom no single grain of false shame ever found resting-place, shook hands warmly with the young musician, understanding at last that this was no dream.

His eyes turned appealingly to her. “You understand—now,” he said, in low earnest tones.

She flashed at him an exquisite look that more than repaid him for all he had endured, for sake of which he felt he could have endured a hundredfold more suffering.

“How did it come about?” he asked James Staunton later on, when she had left them, and was gliding to and fro among her guests.

“She heard of me—how, I do not know,” he said, in a low voice that fell in like an accompaniment to the melody he was playing. “Then she came to me one day, and asked me to play to her, and was so full of praise, and so sweet and gracious—oh, I cannot tell you all—she is an angel!”

“She is!” agreed Heron Archer enthusiastically.

“And she said I ought to have better engagements and not play dance music, and she is going to speak to all her friends, and to-night she gives this party that I may play as I can play, as I have never had the chance of playing yet. And only yesterday it all came out about you. I told her of that engagement at the Marlborough Rooms, and how I should have lost it but for your kindness, and how that gentleman as you were, you took my place, and sat with the band, and brought me the money next day; and, sir, when I told her this, her eyes were full of tears, she grew strangely agitated, and she asked your name, and where you lived, and all about you, and told me how once you had done her a great

service. And I saw by her manner to-night that she was glad to meet you again. And if, indeed, I have been of any use in the matter, or—”

“Use! Oh Jim, you have done me the most inestimable service I have ever received from any human being!”

No wonder Jim Staunton looked up in amazement at those impulsive words. But as he saw the light in the young man’s eyes, the glory and gladness in his face, he seemed to read a meaning beyond what the words told him, and his grateful heart rejoiced that, for all the benefits he had received at Heron Archer’s hands, he had been able to make one return at last.

Ere the evening was over Heron Archer had heard from her lips of the regret she had felt for her misjudgment. Ere the evening was over he had let her see, too, in some degree, the tenacity and devotion of that swift and sudden passion which had leaped up like flame in his heart on that spring morning when they had first met.

And afterwards? Well, afterwards the romance ended, as all such romances should end; and in the next spring Heron Archer led to the altar the girl he had wooed and won for his own.

There was one odd thing about the wedding, people said; and that was, that on the bride’s dress and in her snowy bouquet, as well as along the path and aisles she trod, were scattered bunches of primroses.

Only two people knew what it meant, but they were the two for whom that marriage rite united hearts as well as hands, and before whom the future lay, a land of sweet and glorious promise, that they should henceforth tread together!

CONCERNING CAMELOT.

BY THEO GIFT.

CHAPTER I.

THE thing was that nobody knew anything about them.

“It looks suspicious, you know,” our queen said, shaking her handsome head; and though I put it mildly:

“Hardly suspicious, dear Mrs. Arthur, only unusual among us,” she wouldn’t listen to me, but went on in the same tone:

“And we don’t want suspicious people here. I wish Mr. Braun was more careful. If we had kept the letting of the house in our own hands it wouldn’t have happened;” and there, of course, I agreed; for, as a rule, not only did our king and queen

know everything about their tenants, but all the tenants knew everything about one another, who each was, how he lived and what he did ; and besides, we belonged to them ourselves, and therefore had a right to be particular as to our neighbours, and to resent the settlement among us of any who might introduce a bad element into our select and artistic little society.

For that is what we were—very select and very artistic, and extremely jealous of outsiders coming to disturb our innocent and æsthetic Bohemia with innovating ways or vulgar immorality. Of course, as everyone knows, Camelot is a very tiny place, a mere child's toy-box of miniature red-brick houses, built in quaint Queen Anne patterns, and set out on a patch of ground bordered by the railway on one side and a few acres of kitchen-garden and apple-orchards on the other ; a fragment stolen out of the kitchen-gardens indeed, and made into a suburban home for artistic and "cultured" people. Yet though so near London that the apple-trees looked very black and sooty about the trunks, and the east wind filled our rooms with fog and mist from the city, and even by going up the steps to the railway bridge you could see the line of dark chimney-pots and murky haze of the metropolis encircling us on two sides, we chose to consider ourselves as a world apart, and a very different world from that common wicked one of London town.

Mind you, I don't myself think that London or any place is altogether common or wicked. I cannot quite love the big city, for the three years I spent there were the saddest in my life : seeing that I only came up from my Devonshire home to nurse my dear sister Dora through her last illness, and then stayed on to take care of her two children and the house until the lease of the latter was out, and Doris (she was christened Dora, after her poor mother, but altered that name to the quainter Doris when the rage for old-fashioned things came in) had finished her course at South Kensington and her education generally. Lance was in an architect's office then ; but after he modelled that bust of Cressida which Mr. Arthur bought, he threw up plans altogether for sculpture. It was rather a blow to me at first ; but the Arthurs were very kind and encouraged him, and when once he and Doris had been asked to a garden-party at Camelot, nothing would satisfy either of them but that we should offer ourselves as tenants

for one of the little red houses, and take up our residence there altogether.

Well, it did not much matter to me. London was a big, sad, airless place, and that little plot of suburban villas was not in the least to be compared with the country ; but Lance and Doris liked it, and I couldn't expect two such bright, clever young things to bury themselves down in the wilds of Devonshire. So I made up my mind to like it too, and ended by succeeding so thoroughly that I forgot there had ever been any effort in the matter, and was as proud of my stained floors and peacock dados, and the row of big sunflowers in my tiny garden, as were any of my neighbours of their combinations of colour and "harmony" and revivals of old-fashioned gardening, which looked so homely and commonplace to my west-country eyes, and were so "subtle" and "precious" to theirs. Why, they even fell in love with my plain grey gowns and folded white kerchiefs, which I had worn to please my dear mother (she was a Quaker) ever since I was a girl, and which poor Dora's Bloomsbury friends found so *outré* and dowdy ! "Dowdy indeed ! If you want to be perfectly harmonious, never wear anything else, my dear Miss Jervis," our queen herself said to me ; "we could as ill spare your grey gowns as your sunny self." And after that compliment, what vain old woman wouldn't have clung triumphantly to them ?

But all this time I am not telling you why we were so disturbed about these new arrivals at Camelot. You will understand, of course, that it was only a joke of ours calling the landlord of the estate our "king." You see his name was Arthur, and when he took the idea of building a lot of quaint eccentric houses on this land of his, he called it the "Camelot Park Estate," for which reason his tenants, who, according to his scheme, were to be all artistic or literary people of kindred souls, christened it Camelot simply, and himself "The Stainless King ;" and if every monarch had as loyal and devoted subjects as that dear good man and model landlord, kings would be a happier race than they are.

I suppose even prosperity has its drawbacks, however, for as Camelot grew and prospered Mr. Arthur found that it gave him so much to do, that before long he had to engage an agent to help him with the management of the estate, and this it was which led to the complication I am going to tell you about. Not that Mr. Braun

was a bad agent: on the contrary, he was a very good one; but he thought far more of his patron's pecuniary advantage than of what he was wont to call his "fads," and, wholly regardless of the noble and poetical scheme in which Camelot had its birth, almost the first piece of business he did was to refuse one of the most aesthetic cottages to a delightful if impecunious novelist, and let it in preference to a well-to-do young stockbroker with a wife who never dressed in anything but the most modern of Paris fashions, and went in for gilt frames and chairs in her drawing-room. If that young stockbroker had not been one of the pleasantest and most hospitable of men, and his little wife so fond of new gowns of any sort that she was ready to discard all her old ones for the sake of a fresh supply, I don't know how some of our neighbours would have got over the incident.

There was one villa, however, which had remained unlet for some time. It was a corner house, the garden and one side facing our own cottage, the front looking out on a green field as yet unbuilt on. A small place certainly, with only two bedrooms, but fitted up throughout most charmingly, with miniature bath and dressing-rooms, Dutch tiles, a conservatory, and quite a large garden with a grand old apple-tree in it, which was the envy of Doris's heart.

While the house was building she used to steal clusters of rosy blossoms from it to paint on plates and panels; and later on in the year the king lent her the key to go in and gather the apples as they ripened and fell on the soft green grass below. We grew to consider that tree almost as a property of our own; and it was therefore with some little excitement that, one fine morning, we heard the announcement of Sally, our little maid, that she thought the corner house was going to be let, for Mr. Braun was showing a gentleman over it, and they were out in the garden then.

I am half ashamed to write what follows, it looks so vulgar and inquisitive; but Doris and I went upstairs to the window of my room, and peeped over the little muslin blinds to see what could be seen, and Lance, who had just come in all white with dust and plaster from his studio, thrust his head over ours and peeped too. Sure enough there, under the apple-tree, stood Mr. Braun and the stranger, the latter a tall, handsome, well-dressed man, with all the look of a gentleman; and as the window was open, and

the sweet spring breeze blowing in our direction, we could hear their voices almost as plainly as if they were addressing us.

"You are sure you can do it in the time?" said the stranger.

"We could," said Mr. Braun, "but, really, the house is always considered so perfect, and Mr. Arthur has laid out so much money on it——"

"That, of course, no one could expect him to lay out more," the stranger interrupted rather sharply. "Any alterations will be at my expense. All I asked you about was the time. Mrs. Trevillian is delicate, and I don't want her to have the bother of workmen in the house when she arrives."

Mr. Braun's answer was not so audible, but he seemed to say the time would be ample, and then both men went into the house; and a few minutes later we saw them leave it and go off towards the station.

That same afternoon we met the little agent in the High Street, and in the joy of his heart he must needs tell us that he had got a new tenant for his chief and an opposite neighbour for ourselves.

"Capital people too, I fancy. Don't seem to care what they spend on the house. Taken it for three years."

"Is it a family, Mr. Braun?"

"No family, ma'am, if you mean children; only the gentleman, Mr. Trevillian, and his lady; and I should say she was a bride by the fuss he makes about her comfort and fancies."

"Not people in—in trade, I suppose, Mr. Braun?" said Doris, for which I was rather ashamed of her; for her own great-grandfather was a small bookseller in Taunton, and I do not care who knows it; but I suppose she was thinking of the king's scheme.

"Not unless it's a foreign trade, ma'am, for he told me he had been living chiefly in France for the last five years or so. Bless you, they're of the rich idle sort, and just after Camelot taste I should think. He was very particular about the height of the drawing-room, lest it shouldn't hold his wife's organ, which he said was a very good one, and the dining-room's all to be repapered and painted, because the present tone don't do for some of his pictures. I'm thinking Mr. Arthur will be pleased when he comes back from Antwerp."

We thought so too. It certainly did matter to us who our opposite neighbours were, seeing that we could quite easily

talk to them out of our parlour-windows; and it seemed as if nothing could be more charming than a newly-married couple, refined, musical, artistic, and well-to-do. Lance was the only dissentient.

"What do you know about them after all?" he said, throwing back his fair ruffled hair with an impatient gesture as we sat talking it over after tea. "The wife may be the worst sort of Philistine, and as for the man, I didn't care about his looks a bit."

"Oh Lance!" cried Doris, "Aunt Fanny and I thought him quite handsome and dignified-looking."

Lance tossed his head more impatiently than ever.

"I didn't," he said. "Never mind, I dare say they won't come at all. Pass me the butter, Doris."

It struck us afterwards as strange that Lance should have taken this dislike to Mr. Trevillian; but he was wrong in one thing, for they did come, and within the week; but even before then a cart had arrived full of young trees and plants which it took two men a whole day to put into the ground; then the furniture, after inspecting which we were able to assure our friends that there was not such a thing as a gilt console or a garlanded carpet among it, and which included the organ, a really beautiful instrument and fit for a nobleman's chapel; and after that, each time we looked in at the pretty club-house, which, with its tennis-court and reading-rooms, was one of the favourite institutions of Camelot, we were plied with questions.

"Have the new people come yet? Mind you tell us what they are like."

When they did come, however, no one knew of it or could tell what they were like, for they arrived so late one evening, that even we were not aware of the event till next day; and it was quite late in the afternoon when Doris came rushing into the long low workshop at the bottom of the garden, which Lance called his studio, her pretty face, which no tangled hair or graveyard garments could make anything but fresh and pert and daisylike, all glowing with excitement as she panted out:

"Oh, come and look, do, both of you. She is in the garden, and oh! she is so-o-o-o—"

I really am ashamed to own it again; but, despite a snif or two from Lance, we did go all of us, and peeped over my bedroom-blinds as before. There was more

to see this time. Mr. Trevillian was there indeed, seated on a low chair smoking; but standing near him was a woman, bareheaded in the sunshine; tall, clad in a long blue gown, her slim white hands full of crocuses, her hair of a warm auburn colour, parted on her forehead and rippling down over the ears in a thick wavy mass which glittered in the yellow April sunlight like soft flame, and was loosely coiled into a knot on the back of her neck. About her feet was the short spring grass. Over her head the blue sky and the apple blossoms, their pale, pinky-white petals fluttering down on hair and gown, like showers of rosy-tinted snow.

Doris clasped her hands in girlish ecstasy.

"Oh!" she said with a long-drawn breath, "isn't she quite too — why, Lance——!" But Lance pulled her back from the window and dropped the curtain with an angry jerk.

"Come away, do," he said impatiently; "because she happens to be the most beautiful woman one has ever seen, have we any right to stand staring at her like a lot of cockney cads? How do you know she mayn't have seen us? Aunt Fanny, pray don't let Doris do such things."

His face was quite red and excited, and he never used one of his ordinary phrases, or said Mrs. Trevillian was "utter," or "precious," or any of the terms he and his friends usually applied to people they admired, and then he marched off to the workshop in a huff. I had never seen our Lance in such a mood.

CHAPTER II.

I WONDER where the suspicion first arose that there was something not quite right about the people at the Corner House, or how soon it began to be whispered about?

Perhaps the original root of the thing was in the fact aforementioned, that no one in Camelot knew anything about the Trevillians; not even the Arthurs or Mr. Braun himself. The one thing the latter gentleman had troubled himself about was their reference to their bankers, and this being unexceptionable, he had asked no further; while Mr. Arthur, being away, had known nothing of the matter till the house was let and the people installed in it. Of course this would be nothing in London, where a man may live for twenty years next door to you, and you know no more of him at the end of that time than you did after the first week; but here in little Camelot, where we formed a sort of nineteenth-

century Arcadia, ran in and out of each other's houses, read each other's stories and poems, and criticised each other's pictures, it was widely different.

Nearly all of us, indeed, had been recommended to the Arthurs as tenants by prior acquaintanceship or by one of the earlier settlers. Mrs. Dash, who wrote novels, persuaded her dear friend, Mr. Blank, who illustrated magazines, to migrate to Camelot because the light was so much clearer than in town. Professor Asterisk, who was on old chum of King Arthur's, and whose brain was suffering from the noise of London, came here for quiet; and the widow and children of poor Star, the actor, for economy; but in all these cases most of us knew all there was to know of the Blanks, Stars, and Asterisks long before they came among us, and were ready to be intimate as soon as introduced; while it was a proud boast of Mr. Payne, our ritualistic young clergyman (religion, like everything else, was "high" at Camelot), that with all their eccentricities there was not one black, hardly one speckled sheep among all his little flock.

Now the question which was being asked among us was no other than this: was the beautiful woman at whom we had gazed so admiringly on her arrival, Mr. Trevillian's wife at all, and if not, what were we to do if she were to become a member of the club, or were to follow up the opening afforded her by one or two people, the Arthurs and the doctor and his wife, who had unwittingly called on her at the outset?

To be sure they had not found her "at home," nor had she returned their call as yet, but the latter event might occur any day, and though to be a member of the club entailed a recommendation from the king and either Mr. Payne or the applicant's own clergyman, these were such simple formalities that they had almost come to be taken for granted, and to blackball a person without proof positive of the most damning cause would have been almost impossible. Was it to be done for the first time against this charming and cultivated couple, to whom, Mr. Braun owned, he had recommended the club as one of the chief attractions of the place?

Yet what had we really against them? Nothing very tangible.

Mr. Trevillian had been unwontedly reserved with the agent, but reserve does not necessarily imply guilt; neither does discourtesy, which term might be applied to Mrs. Trevillian's remissness in returning

the visits of those people who had charitably left cards on her. Still there was no denying that their conduct was not quite like ordinary people on first arriving in a little country place. For one thing, we had been told that they were a newly-married couple; but after staying for less than a week at the Corner House, Mr. Trevillian went away one morning and never returned for more than a month, which is scarcely what a bridegroom would generally care to do. It is true that while he was here he appeared to be on most affectionate terms with Mrs. Trevillian, and indeed did little else but sit out in the garden with her, sing with her, or take her for walks; but even in these things their conduct was rather peculiar; for though within the garden-walls, she often went about bareheaded, and used to rake and weed and run in and out like any active happy girl; out of doors she never showed herself, except so thickly veiled that no one could have recognised her features, and clinging as closely to her husband's arm as though she was either too weak to walk alone, or was afraid of being snatched from him. Nor did they on these occasions explore the quaint little village, as would have been natural in new-comers who had just taken up their abode in it. On the contrary, they invariably turned their backs on Camelot as soon as they left their own door, taking their way across the fields and waste land, where there was certainly nothing to see, and where, if they did meet anyone who looked enquiringly at them, his audacity was sure to be rewarded by a scowl from Mr. Trevillian which might have frightened a burglar.

The same air of reticence, not to say mystery, was shown in their household. This latter consisted of an old woman and a boy; and as all the shopping in Camelot was done at one establishment, a certain brand-new, "Early-English," Co-operative Store, where you could buy anything, from a leg of mutton to a peacock's feather, you may guess that no little gossip went on among the housekeepers and maids assembled at its counters of a morning.

In this, however, the servants at the Corner House proved markedly different to the rest of the community, for no amount of chatter or questioning on the part of neighbouring domestics availed to draw one word of information respecting her master or mistress from the old woman, whose grim face and short surly answers were enough in themselves to frighten all but

the boldest, while the boy proved equally uncommunicative, turning off all enquiries by a laugh or a chaffing answer, and beyond the fact that he always spoke of "my mistress and Mr. Trevillian," never of "my master," and that once, in answer to some questions about foreign parts, he said "he had never been in them, so he couldn't say," no more was to be got out of him than from the old dame herself.

The Trevillians were not, however, to be condemned only by their own or their servants' silence.

He had been gone from the place about a fortnight, and the solitary shadow against the fire-lit blind of an evening, the solitary figure pacing up and down the garden-walk, or creeping out veiled and cloaked in the twilight for a lonely ramble, had something in it so friendless and pathetic that I began to feel quite angry with my neighbours' suspicions, and was just meditating calling on Mrs. Trevillian myself, when, one evening, as we were dining at the Arthurs', the Corner House mystery cropped up in conversation as usual, and attracted the attention of a London acquaintance of our king's who was at table.

"Trevillian?" said he, looking up. "I wonder if it's the same man I knew in Paris? Tall, good-looking, wears a long beard, and sings very well."

There was a general exclamation that the description fitted exactly, and as everyone knew that the one piece of information vouchsafed about himself by Mr. Trevillian was that he had lived on the Continent for some years, the stranger was plied with questions about him.

Unfortunately, however, he had very little to tell. He had met the gentleman in question about a dozen times, had talked to him about music and politics, and found him a very pleasant gentlemanly fellow; but their acquaintance had been confined to the Club and the Bois, and he had never visited him or been introduced to his wife.

"Oh, he was married then?" someone said eagerly, and the speaker looked up in some surprise.

"Married? Certainly; and to a very nice-looking little woman. I often saw them out together."

"I suppose there are people who would call the Diana of Ephesus a 'nice-looking little woman,'" said Lance in a low angry tone; but fortunately someone else spoke at the same moment.

"A very pretty woman certainly. Such lovely eyes!"

"To those who admire black eyes; but, for a Frenchwoman, I think she is pretty. That neat little figure and curly black hair—"

A chorus of voices interrupted him.

"Black? Why, her hair is a rich red gold, and her eyes—"

"Were the colour of her hair," said the stranger quietly. "If that is black now, she must have dyed it; but I didn't know ladies could dye their eyes also."

"Mrs. Trevillian's eyes are blue. No one who had seen her once could ever forget them," said Lance suddenly, "and as to her being little, she is taller than any lady here present. I think, sir, you have been mistaking some other person for Mr. Trevillian's wife."

"And I am sure I am not," said the stranger, surprised though good-humoured. "Though I did not know Mrs. Trevillian personally, several of my friends did, and could tell you the same as I do. She is a tiny woman, thoroughly French, and wears her hair short in a crop."

"Perhaps this lady is a second wife," said our queen very kindly, but with a look of rebuke at poor Lance.

"How long ago is it since you met them in Paris, Mr. Robinson?"

Mr. Robinson thought a moment.

"About two months," he said. "If Mrs. Trevillian is dead and her husband re-married in that time, all I can say is that he has been very quick about it."

There was a general glancing at one another, and a silence which said more than words.

For my part I felt very sorry, I could not help it, for the beautiful sad-eyed creature all alone at the Corner House at present; but I was sorrier still when, as we were walking home a little later, Lance burst out wrathfully:

"What a petty, gossiping, spiteful set we are! I hope, Aunt Fanny, you're not as ready as the rest to believe all manner of evil of that poor lady?"

"My dear boy—" I said, quite shocked; but he would not let me finish.

"All right, believe what you like; but don't ask me to listen to it. The man may be a scoundrel if you please. I always thought he looked like one; but how anyone can glance at her face, and not read purity and goodness in it, I can't think. If anybody has been deceived it is she, and I'll swear it."

A day or two after this I found out that Lance too was going in for solitary twilight walks, and that his return home generally coincided with the lighting of the lamp in the parlour-window over the way.

"Oh dear! oh dear!" I said to myself, "what folly is my boy dreaming of now?" and I got so uneasy, being a silly old woman, that one day, when Doris was spending the evening out, I went for a walk as well, and chanced to meet Mrs. Trevillian just as she was returning across the open space of grassy ground which bounded the village on that side.

It was getting late, and by the dim-reflecting light the grass and hedges and the distant buildings of Camelot looked black, while the sky beyond glowed with the clear green light of a jewel, against which the tall slight figure, wrapped in a long pale-coloured dust cloak, had something strangely ghostlike and shadowy. She had thrown back her thick veil, however, on account of the heat, and I suppose there was nothing very alarming to her in an old lady's face, for her beautiful eyes met my look quite frankly, and with an expression of wistful, sorrowful gentleness which almost won my heart. Not altogether, however, for there in the rear was Lance; far enough off, it is true, for me not to see him at first; but, as we came nearer, the start with which he recognised me and the rush of colour to his face were so boyishly self-betraying, that I felt more sorry than angry with him, and as I put my hand on his arm, I only said :

"Oh Lance, my dear, my dear, is this wise?"

"Why not?" he said petulantly. "I'm only taking a walk like yourself. Where's the harm in that, auntie?"

"In a walk? None, my dear, but—forgive me, Lance—there is a great deal of talk at present about that poor lady; and I take as much interest in her as you do. If you compromise her name still more by following her in her walks, you will do her serious harm at any rate; and I think you would be sorry for it."

His passionate answer took my breath away.

"Sorry! I would shoot myself rather. But, Aunt Fanny, I did not come out to follow her—only to be in the neighbourhood in case she met any rude or unpleasant people. There are plenty of rough characters loafing about these wastes after dusk, and a woman as lovely as she is, a stranger too—Why, aunt, you

know we would not let Doris walk here alone after sunset."

"Yes, my dear," I answered, "but Doris is in our care, and Mr. Trevillian—"

"Where is Mr. Trevillian?" Lance broke in contemptuously. "For aught we know he may have deserted her, as he has probably done his former—wife. He has been gone a month now, and she—Have you noticed how pale and ill she looks? But perhaps he has reasons for not staying long in England. Do you know what they are saying of him now?"

"No, my dear; what?"

"That he had to leave the country some years ago on account of a big fraud in which he was concerned. He was manager of a bank, and swindled, or embezzled, or something. I daresay she never heard the story; but the king is awfully vexed about it."

CHAPTER III.

IT was quite true. People had been setting themselves to make enquiries about the Trevillians, and had found out that a person of his name, and answering in every way to his description, had got into some grievous trouble of the sort aforementioned about six years ago, and had only escaped a criminal prosecution by flying the country. How he had managed to come back again now, and under his own name, was not explained; but possibly money or interest might have been used to hush up the matter. There seemed no doubt, however, as to his identity, and it was further said that he was a married man at the time of his disgrace and flight.

Was Mrs. Trevillian the wife in question? Lance, of course, vowed that it was so, and that it was shame for her husband's villainy which made her hide her face and lead a life of seclusion; but while the subject was still under discussion the gentleman who gave rise to it reappeared at the Corner House, and resumed his gardening and walks as quietly as if he had never left them off, as well as those evening duets with his wife, when the two rich voices, rising high above the pealing notes of the organ, used to fill the summer air with such strains of melody as made passers-by pause to listen, and held us hushed and breathless with delight till far into the night.

Yet he only stayed with her five days on this occasion, and when next we heard of him it was in a character which threw a still darker colour on his life.

Someone from Camelot chanced to meet him at Forest Hill about five weeks after his last brief visit to Camelot, and surprised at seeing him there, had the curiosity to follow him. He had not to go far. In about five minutes Mr. Trevillian turned in at the gate of one of those ordinary well-to-do suburban residences which are so common thereabouts. Two or three children's faces were watching for him from the parlour-window, and as he came into view there was a shout of "Papa!" and a rush of a couple of long-legged, black-eyed, foreign-looking little girls and a sturdy handsome boy to greet the home-comer. Greatly excited and somewhat shocked, the amateur detective turned away, but only as far as a baker's shop at the corner, where he proceeded to make a few enquiries. To his surprise, they were answered more fully than he could have hoped. "Who lived at Holly Lodge? Why, some people of the name of Trevillian had took it about a month back, but weren't new comers for all that, for they'd had a house in the same neighbourhood when they were first married, and dealt here for bread. They went away some five year or more ago, some folks said because madame (she was a Frenchwoman) didn't like England; others because Mr. Trevillian had had some business trouble; but he (the baker) didn't know nothing about that. It wasn't his way to poke his nose into other people's affairs so long as they paid their bread-book reg'lar."

The amateur detective took the hint, thanked him, and departed; but from that day even those who were least prone to think evil felt themselves obliged to abandon Mr. Trevillian's cause, and to content themselves with holding their tongues when he was spoken of.

It was with regard to the unfortunate partner in his offences that opinions were still divided. Of course all ideas as to her being the lawful wife had had to be abandoned after the Forest Hill baker's confirmation of Mr. Robinson's story; but there still remained the doubt whether, as Lance said, she might not be equally innocent and deceived as to her husband's conduct; and this question was enough to set all Camelot by the ears.

The young men of course were all vehement in her defence, and so were a few among the elder ones, who could not help being fascinated by the exquisite purity of the face which, seen so rarely at other times, shone down all the rest of her

sex every Sunday in the painfully modern-mediæval little church of which Mr. Payne was the vicar; and equally, of course, all the married women were dead against her, and convinced that King Arthur did very wrong to let such a creature live in one of his houses.

Ah, dear me! I often scolded myself for it; but down in my secret soul I could not help pitying the poor woman who now only received a flying visit of an hour or two at rare intervals from Mr. Trevillian; and whose life might almost have been a nun's, but for an occasional visit which she paid to town, and from which she used to return of an evening looking so white and tired that my old heart could hardly help aching for her.

Yet, rare as these excursions were, they did her more harm than anything else; for on one occasion she mentioned to our station-master that she had lost her purse in the train, she thought just before getting out at Forest Hill Station; and even this got about, and you may guess how it damaged her with those who, like Lance, had been bold in asserting that we had no reason to suppose that she was even aware of the existence of the other household.

This was not the worst, however. The very next time that she returned from a visit to London, she was accompanied by a gentleman who followed her up the High Street, and overtook her just as they came in front of her own house.

I was sewing at my parlour-window, and saw the start she gave, and the way in which her colour went first white, and then red, in a way which looked far more like dismay than pleasure, though Mrs. McGregor, who was sitting with me, thought the contrary.

A few words, very few, of evident indignation on her side and appeal on his followed, and then she almost hurried into her own house, the door of which was being held open by the old woman, and the stranger, left outside, stood for a minute with rather a discomfited air, and then sauntered slowly away.

He did not go far, however; only to the inn, where he made various enquiries about the lady of the house, speaking of her as a "widow," and manifesting much surprise at hearing of Mr. Trevillian's existence. He even asked for a full description of that gentleman, and having heard all that the landlord had to say in the way of information and gossip on the subject, sat down and wrote a note to Mrs. Trevillian, which

he despatched by the waiter on the morning after, following it up by a call in person about an hour later.

This time he was admitted, and I felt sorry for it, for Doris, coming down from her little painting-room shortly after he had left, told me that poor Mrs. Trevillian was sitting under the apple-tree in the garden, her face hidden in her hands, and crying as if her heart would break.

I think it was the following evening, Lance and Doris were spending it with a friend, and the postman had gone his last round and departed about five minutes before, when I was startled by a violent knocking at the door, and going to it found the old woman from over the way trembling with agitation, and her face quite pale, as she told me that her mistress was in a fainting fit from which she couldn't recover her. Would I come over, or would I let my servant go for the doctor, for the boy was out and she dared not leave her poor lady alone?

Of course I went over at once, sending her off for the doctor; but I suppose I knew more about faints than she did; for before many minutes I had that poor, beautiful creature, whom I found lying on the floor, stiff and white as a corpse, and with a crumpled letter clenched in her hand, resting in my arms, with her head on my bosom and a faint colour coming back into her cheeks as she tried to thank me, and ask me what was the matter. Had she been ill, and where was old Susan?

I told her that she had fainted, and that Susan was frightened and had gone for the doctor; but she only heard the first words.

"Fainted? Oh yes; I remember now. The letter! Oh, how could I forget it? My husband, my dear husband! Do you know what has happened to me? He is alive, and his innocence is proved! Ah, I always knew it would be, some day."

"Your husband?" I repeated, bewildered.

"Yes. I have not seen him for six years. He would have had me think he was dead, but I knew better. May I tell you about it? There is no harm in talking of him now, and I am so happy—so happy!"

And then and there she told me the whole story, her head on my breast, and her soft hands clasping my wrinkled fingers, as if I had been her mother; but, dear me, dear me, how I blushed for our village gossips before the tale was done!

For Mr. Trevillian was her brother, nothing more nor less, and her husband, Arthur Trevillian, was their first cousin. It was he who was suspected of embezzling the bank moneys, and who, in the first shock to an over-sensitive, impulsive nature, of discovering that a large fraud had been committed through his own carelessness in leaving too much in the hands of subordinates, had done the most foolish thing an innocent man could do, and fled the country to escape the disgrace of the impending prosecution. He left a letter behind him for his brother-in-law, confiding his wife to the latter's care, and imploring the forgiveness of both for the shame he had brought on them. He said he was guiltless of the crime imputed to him, but his own culpable folly had left him no means of proving it, and rather than stand in a felon's dock, or still further injure the innocent woman who had taken the burden of his name by placing her before the world in the position of a felon's wife, he had resolved to escape the ignominy of a trial, and only trusted that death would soon release her from even the shadow of a marriage which had been so unfortunate to her.

Two months later, and while the pursuit of him was still hot, that trust was realised, for news came to England that he was dead, drowned from a river steamer on the Mississippi; and the facts having been verified apparently beyond dispute, the search for him ceased, and his name was allowed to rest in silence. Two people, however, never believed in his death—his wife and her brother; and in her confidence that he would one day return to her, and establish the innocence of which she needed no assurance, the former even continued to live in the town and close to the house where he had brought her as a bride; and, for his own safety, she wore widow's weeds for him, to mourn him in her heart as absent, not dead. Her life was a very sad one, however, for few, even among his friends, shared her faith in his innocence, and her own brother's wife was so convinced to the contrary that, rather than remain in a country where their name had been so disgraced, she persuaded her husband to take her back to France, thus leaving her young sister-in-law more desolate than ever. The poor thing had another trial too—one I could easily imagine, though she blushed like a girl in owning it. Men would fall in love with her and want her to marry them; and by-and-by came a suitor more formidable

than the rest—a son of one of the bank directors, a man who would take neither rebuff nor denial, and who carried his persecution of her to such a pitch that, in the impossibility, for her husband's own sake, of hinting to him her reason for shrinking from the idea of a second marriage, she took the resolution of leaving L—— during his temporary absence, and making her home in some place where he would not be likely to follow her.

In this trouble she wrote to her brother to come to her, and it was he who, having heard of Camelot, decided that it would be the very place for her; while the idea of taking the house in his name, and by simply speaking of her as "Mrs. Trevillian" to allow people to credit her with a husband's protection, was hers, urged on him to avoid the same difficulties which had troubled her at L——. Her own innocence, and her desire to lead as secluded a life as possible, while her husband's name remained under a cloud, prevented her from seeing the inconveniences to which this might expose her; while it was simply her dread of being followed by the persistent suitor from whom she had fled that made her go about as little, and as thickly veiled, as she had done. In the meantime, however, her brother, feeling her need of protection, had returned to England with his family, and it was in one of the rare visits which she felt it was her duty to make to her unfriendly sister-in-law that Mrs. Arthur Trevillian chanced to meet the very man from which she had been hiding. How he recognised and followed her we have seen; but it now transpired that the gossip of the landlord at the inn had enlightened him as to the imputations cast on the object of his passion, and he used the discovery to obtain admittance to her, and by working on her woman's delicacy to secure the acceptance of his suit. That he failed utterly in the latter it is needless to say; but none the less he left the brave and long-enduring wife wounded to the very soul by the news of how her fair fame had been traduced, and her brother's name dragged through the mud, by people who knew nothing of either, and of whom she had never thought except with kindness and a little admiring envy of their pretty artistic homes, and the happy social life they seemed to live among one another.

"But that is all over now," she said, wiping the indignant tears from her eyes. "The man who committed the robbery, a clerk

in whom Arthur foolishly trusted, has confessed to his guilt; and my darling's innocence is proved at last. He has written to tell me of it himself, and to say he will be in England next week. Next week! oh think of that! He has suffered terribly, he has been ill and lonely, and his hair is quite white; but he has never ceased to love and watch over me from a distance, and it was because he knew how true and faithful I had been to him, that now that he is free to come back, he is not afraid to ask my forgiveness for the mistake he made in ever leaving me."

"My dear," I said gravely, "he needs it. It was more than a mistake, it was very wrong. Suppose, believing in his death, you had married again!"

"In that case, he says, he had determined that I should never be robbed of the happiness to which I had a right by a discovery of the truth; and I know him well enough to believe it. But why suppose any such thing, or talk of wrongs or forgiveness between husband and wife who love one another, and have been parted as long as we have? He is coming back to me, that is all I can think of, and we shall go away from this place where people have gone out of their way to think evil of us who never interfered with or harmed them, and shall be happy again as we were long ago."

And that is what happened. Mr. Trevillian arrived next week; but neither he nor his wife could forgive Camelot for the way in which it had chattered about her. They went away a few days later, and the beautiful face and sweet voice were lost to us for ever.

She wrote to me a few months afterwards, it is true; but we never saw her again, and the Corner House is let to some commonplace people in whom nobody takes any interest whatever.

MR. HANSARD'S WARD.

BY MISS MULHOLLAND.

I.

THE following little comedy was opened by the accidental circumstance of that respectable lawyer, Mr. Benjamin Hansard, having for a short time in his service an unusually absent-minded and careless servant.

One morning this domestic received a note from his master, with orders to deliver it at once at a certain hotel; and imme-

diately afterwards Mr. Hansard jumped into a hansom and hurried away to catch a train from London. He was hardly gone when the servant with the wandering mind swept the note with other litter into a waste-paper basket, and sauntered forth upon business or pleasure of his own.

Half an hour later a knock came to the door, and a gentleman was admitted by a maid-servant, who believed her master was within because she had heard he was not going to his chambers that morning, in consequence of his expecting a visitor at home. She left him in the study and went up to Mr. Hansard's bedroom door, grumbling to herself as she went at Thomas's absence, and knocking, she informed, as she thought, the master of the house that a gentleman was waiting to see him below. Then she also went out, as it was her lawful holiday.

Meantime the visitor strode about the study, stared at the calf-bound law books on the shelves, gazed out of the window, sat down, got up again, and did everything else that waiting people generally do. While he did so he reflected :

"I feel downright ill ever since I heard that that girl is in London. If people only knew the asses they make of themselves by planning marriages before they die, and making tyrannical conditions as to their confounded legacies, I don't suppose they would indulge in such freaks. When I think of the ill-tempered, disagreeable letters that young minx has been writing me ever since she was fifteen I can hardly make up my mind to meet her with common civility. Not that I want to be hard on her; she is not mercenary certainly; but her impertinence in treating me as if I were so as a matter of course, merely because I have been, like herself, thrust into a false position, is provoking, to speak mildly. I am resolved that things shall be placed on their proper footing from the first, and not all Hansard's worldly-wise pleading shall induce me to parley with this intolerable young woman for a moment. He shall tell her from me that I am as little desirous of gaining a fortune by an uncongenial marriage as she herself can possibly be. By Jove! I wish he would appear. I have an appointment at twelve."

At this moment a carriage stopped at the door and a lady stepped out. A second maid now opened the door, and having been told by the housekeeper that master was waiting in to receive a visit from his rich ward from America, and having heard

a man's step in the room the moment before, she informed the young lady that Mr. Hansard was in his study, and ushered her through the door of the room without looking further.

The impatient gentleman at the window turned to look at the new comer, and saw a slight, graceful, elegantly-dressed girl, with a round face as fresh and fair as an apple-blossom, large grey eyes, and delicate eyebrows, with that surprised expression which gives piquancy to a pretty face; a mouth that seemed made for laughter, so rosy the lips, so white the teeth they disclosed; a dimpled chin, and brown hair shot with gold. A tiny and daintily-gloved hand did not escape him, indeed was unexpectedly forced upon his notice as the girl advanced quickly to meet him, saying :

"I am so glad to meet you at last, Mr. Hansard, to thank you for all the trouble you have taken for me during so many years."

Mr. Hansard's waiting visitor was amazed, but not being a dull man he grasped the situation at once, with all its absurdity.

"By Jove!" was his first reflection, "and this is Henrietta Featherstonhaugh! She is not long enough for such a name. I fancied her as tall as a maypole. This is the girl who told me she was as ugly as she was ignorant and ill-tempered! If temper and education keep pace with her looks—she is an angel!"

After this flash of thought the gentleman took her hand gravely, and said :

"My dear Miss Featherstonhaugh, I am delighted to see you."

"I can't think of anything else he ought to say just at the first moment," reflected our hero; "but that much is safe, and I will certainly prolong this misunderstanding to the utmost, let the after-consequences be what they may. I hope Hansard has fallen asleep upstairs, and that he may not come down for the next hour."

Having shaken hands, they changed their relative positions, and the light falling full upon the gentleman the lady gazed at him fixedly, while an expression of lively surprise sat upon all her features.

"Excuse me if I stare," she said, with an enchanting smile, "but I thought—I really don't know why—I seemed to have been told—that you were quite an elderly person."

"And you do not think me looking old? I must confess, however, that my hair is

getting thin on the top. You will hardly perceive it here, but in a better light——”

“That happens with all young men nowadays” (joyously); “at least, all who have brains.”

The imaginary Mr. Hansard bowed. “Allow me to say, in my turn, that I was totally unprepared to see so charming a young lady—after your descriptions of yourself.”

“I am glad I please you,” said Miss Featherstonhaugh simply. “As for some things I said, you know they were to frighten off that odious George Gainsborough. And you must help me to keep up the disgust in his mind. You will, I am sure, enter into my little plans. You seem the sort of man who might prefer to marry a person chosen by himself, someone whom you really liked. You—ah—I forgot! I know—at least, I heard—that you—you have five grown-up children.”

“And are a widower,” added her thoughts; but she said no more, only gazed at the young man before her, bewildered.

“That was a mistake,” said the young man gravely, after a severe struggle to master the muscles of his face. “But about this Gainsborough. If you do not already prefer someone else——”

“I?”—with a little laugh of scornful surprise—“Oh no; nor do I mean to.”

“Then why nourish such enmity against him? He may be a very fine fellow, if you only allow yourself to know him.”

“I could not bear the very sight of him,” cried Henrietta. “If you but knew how that man has poisoned my existence ever since I can remember. If I went out in the sun, it was: ‘Oh, you will be freckled, and Mr. Gainsborough will not look at you!’ If I did not learn my lessons, it was: ‘Oh, Mr. Gainsborough will have nothing to do with a dunce!’ If I would not eat I was to be too thin; if I ate enough I was to be too fat to hit the fastidious taste of Mr. George Gainsborough. ‘And then,’ they said, ‘you know you will lose your fortune.’ That was the constant cry. It was not for love’s sake I was to please Mr. Gainsborough, but to save my money. When I was fifteen I took the matter into my own hands, as you know, and determined to make him hate the thought of me. I said to myself, I am quite sick of being an heiress, so rich that I am nothing else, but only rich; and as for depriving him—why a man ought to be able to work, and earn for himself.”

“True; but you——”

“You know, Mr. Hansard, that I shall have a hundred a year when I am twenty-one, and still a spinster. It is not much; I shall have to give up wearing these pretty clothes and things. But then I intend to see the world and to work. I have already got a plan. I will tell you all about it another time.”

“Why not now?”

“Because I have got so much else to say. First of all though, my chaperon has obeyed you and brought me to England, and I have also obeyed in allowing her to bring me. I may as well tell you at once that I never should have come, only that I wanted to see England, and prefer to carry out my own little plans here. Besides, I thought you would have a kindly eye over me, for I don’t want to do anything too dreadfully wild, you know. Though I do mean to have my own way, I would like your advice.”

“I see. As a lawyer, I am not unused to have my advice sought in that spirit.”

“And, first of all, I want to impress upon you that I can have no meeting with George Gainsborough. I will not see him, will not hear a word he has to say. It was chiefly with a view to this that I was so anxious to see you at once. You must help me to keep him off.”

“You may change your mind.”

“Never. The other matter I wish to consult you about is this. You know that when, at twenty-one, I am found still unmarried my fortune goes to some old ladies, cousins of my uncle who left me this troublesome inheritance. I believe they are poorly off, and I have always felt that injustice had been done to them in order to make a sort of golden idol of me. Now when that is all put straight, I shall be perfectly content. I hope you understand me.”

“I am afraid I do,” said the supposed Mr. Hansard, looking at the blooming lively face lifted to his, and feeling provoked, bewitched, charmed, and angry. “I fear I do; but, fortunately, there are yet some months in which to reconsider your decision.”

“If you are going back upon all that, I will say good-morning,” cried Miss Featherstonhaugh, “and, indeed, I have a great deal to do to-day, and must go and set about it. Good-bye, Mr. Hansard, and try to think my actions do not all spring from unworthy caprice. If you only knew what a thraldom I have suffered, and how I gasp for fresh air!”

He held her hand for one moment, took

a last look at her roselike face, and then in a little breeze of laughter, perfume, and musical words she fluttered out of the room. He saw her into her carriage; she nodded brightly, and was gone.

The supposed guardian then rang the bell violently; and upon ascertaining that Mr. Hansard was not in the house, went away in a very impatient frame of mind, to pass the time that must intervene before the lawyer's return.

II.

LATE that evening Mr. Hansard, an elderly dignified man with a grave reticent countenance, was sitting over his wine when Mr. Gainsborough was announced.

"My dear fellow," said the lawyer, "I am so glad you came. I have been quite distressed by the curious mistakes which it appears have been made to-day by my domestics. All the fault of that forgetful rascal, who, I see, must go at last. I left a message for you that I was obliged unexpectedly to leave town; also a note to be delivered at Miss Featherstonhaugh's hotel, putting off my interview with her till to-morrow; and neither reached its destination. I fear you and she met under peculiarly awkward circumstances, and I have just written to apologise to her. I was about to do the same to you——"

"A note of explanation to her," interrupted Gainsborough eagerly. "Has it left the house?"

"I hope so. But, really, that fellow——"

"Excuse me, Hansard, but may I ring and ask? If it be not gone, let me tear up the note."

Mr. Hansard stared.

"What do you mean?"

"I will tell you afterwards. May I ring?"

At a nod from the lawyer he rang. The servant appeared, declaring that he was just going out with the letter.

"Give it to me," said his master; and after the door had closed upon the man, he handed the letter to Gainsborough, who deliberately tore it across.

"I met her to-day," said the young man, smiling, "under the most curious circumstances—not awkward, but peculiarly delightful. She took me for you."

The lawyer laughed.

"I am complimented," he said. "Not every young fellow would be flattered at such a mistake."

"We got on excellently. She gave me

some of her confidence, and promised me more. I cannot have her enlightened at present. I have laid a little plot to punish her impertinence, to have my revenge for her malice. Allow us to make further acquaintance."

"Let me understand you. This young lady, whatever be her faults, is under my guardianship. Do you intend to annoy and wound her merely, or would you after all marry, merely to spite her, a plain, ignorant, ill-tempered girl?"

"My dear Hansard, she is simply enchanting!"

The lawyer elevated his eyebrows and looked incredulous.

"Have we not seen her photograph?"

"No more her photograph than it was yours or mine. That was a part of her plan to get rid of me. She is lovely, elegant, piquante, bewitching! No wonder she was indignant at being bought and sold. I admire her pluck. I tell you I never was so captivated."

"Humph! You have fallen in love with her at first sight. Capital! And she?"

"As you, I think she liked me very well. But as myself—— By Jove! how she does hate me! Had your note of explanation gone she would never have looked at me again. If you allow me to pass as you for some time longer I may punish her by winning her affections."

Mr. Hansard sipped his wine.

"I have met with many curious situations in the course of my long experience," he said, "but never with one more amusing than this. You know, my dear fellow, that it has always been my wish to see you married to the wealthy niece of my old friend. You are a man of brilliant parts, and that longing of yours after a parliamentary career——"

"Pshaw!" said Gainsborough impatiently. "I was not thinking of the money at all. I have my profession, and, as she said, 'a man ought to be able to work for himself.' If she prefers to be a poor man's wife we can wait till the stipulated time is over, endow the old ladies with the money, and be happy in her way."

"Ahem!" said Mr. Hansard, looking at his young friend's flushed face and sparkling eyes. "The fellow is in earnest," he reflected. "I will give him his head, and we shall see what will come of it."

"Well?" he said aloud. "What would you have me to do to further your scheme?"

"If necessary, you must personate me, George Gainsborough."

"The devil! Are you going to make a harlequin of me at my time of life?"

"I see," said Gainsborough, laughing, "you are still young enough to object to being made an object of disgust to a pretty girl."

"How am I to proceed?"

"We must have a George Gainsborough to bring forward if occasion should arise. If not, we may be discovered. You will not refuse?"

"On the contrary—I will go farther. I will not wait for a case of necessity. I will call to-morrow and send up my card, that there may be no mistake. I mean your card. If she sees me, I will be as stiff and elderly as possible, and bore her to death."

"And you will abuse me—I mean you, Hansard, accusing him of being the cause of our bad understanding?"

"Assuredly. I will rouse her feminine spirit in your behalf."

III.

NEXT day George Gainsborough presented himself at Miss Featherstonhaugh's hotel. In a bright room, and without her hat, she looked even more delightful than at their first interview, a perfect rosebud, and shining with an archness and intelligence that does not always accompany the rosebud style of beauty. She ran to meet him with outstretched hands, exclaiming :

"Ah, my guardian! I am so pleased to see you. I want to tell you that the odious Gainsborough has been here already."

"I am glad you have been induced to see him."

"I? Oh no! I would not see him. At least, I beheld him; but it was through a chink of that door. Nothing will induce me to hold intercourse with him."

"What am I to understand?"

"He called this morning so early that it is evident he can't be a well-bred man."

"I wonder what o'clock it is now."

"Oh, never mind. You can call when you like. Are you not my guardian? But he—; well, he sent up his card, and I made Mrs. Slumberton, my chaperon, receive him. Even she, who is always lecturing and advising me for my good, was shocked to find that he is quite bald and elderly. As for me—I could not help taking a peep at him through that folding-door, which does not shut properly; and

what with his oldness and his prosy talk, I have not recovered from it yet!"

"Poor fellow! It seems he has only diminished his chance with you."

"He never had any. Not a fragment. My instincts are never at fault, and from the first I knew he was intolerable."

"I am afraid he is going to give us some trouble."

"Then I will give him trouble for trouble, I can assure you. Yesterday I told you I had some plans to confide to you. Will you sit down and give me a hearing?"

"Willingly. I am bound to give you all my attention."

"No, you are not bound. I hate being bound. I will not have anyone bound on my account. The only thing worth having in this world is liberty."

"Then, as I am not bound, I had better go away and keep an appointment with a person who likes being bound."

She looked very blank and sighed. "Of course, if you must. But I thought you might wish—"

"I do wish. Hang my appointment!"

The girl laughed gleefully. "How very unlike the language of a guardian. Oh, you ought to have been Mr. Gainsborough, and Mr. Gainsborough ought to have been you!"

"Ahem!" said George. "I assure you we are two very different persons. But if you would like me to copy his manners—"

"For Heaven's sake, no! I only meant that guardians are so different—in books, you know. I never knew one out of a book before. But everything in this world is, I observe, exactly opposite to what it is supposed to be."

"That is the result of your long experience? But about this Gainsborough. I do confess he is not worthy of you. I have known him to be taken for the father of five grown-up children."

"He is old enough to be my father, I am sure. Here is my plan. I told you I intend to relinquish the fortune, and to strike out an independent career for myself."

"Doctor, or lawyer?"

"Nonsense! As if I could be either! No, I intend to be a poultry-farmer."

"Capital!"

"My intimate friends call me Hen. A good name to start with."

"Excellent!"

"I have lately learned that my poor old ladies, whom I have deprived of a com-

fortable income, are in Sussex, trying to eke out their subsistence by the culture and sale of fowls."

"Indeed."

"And as they want a girl-assistant, I have offered for the situation."

"The very thing."

Henrietta looked at him with a little dismay. "I think it the very thing; but it would be kinder of you to disagree with me. I shall have to give up a good deal; and I daresay I shall look hideous in a brown holland pinafore and a pair of wooden clogs."

"I cannot tell till I have seen you thus arrayed. Afterwards I will give you my candid opinion."

"Oh, you will come to see me?"

"As your guardian it will be only correct."

"But they must not know you are my guardian. It would spoil everything were they to discover who I am."

"Then I must come as a purchaser of poultry."

"That will be charming. After I have passed the age of twenty-one, and seen the property devolve upon the old ladies, I will take up the business on my own account, and develop into a thriving poultry farmer."

"And confess your identity?"

"That is as may be when the time shall arrive. Perhaps I shall be afraid of the lamentations of my old ladies. I do not know. I will not be bound."

"And when do you intend to join your old ladies?"

"That will depend on the answer I receive to my application. Of course I shall let you know before I start for Daisy Farm."

As Gainsborough walked away from the hotel, he reflected that things were taking a capital turn; for although he must have more opportunities of meeting Henrietta in London, yet there, every moment was likely to bring frustration of his plans by revealing his identity to the wilful girl. Frequent visits to Sussex, in the character of a fowl-fancier, must be the means through which to carry on his suit.

He must at once begin to get up some knowledge of poultry, so as to be able to sustain creditably the part he was to play at Daisy Farm. He went off to search for books on the subject, his mind filled with visions of Hen in brown holland and wooden clogs, selling her chickens to him, a connoisseur from a distance; a merry

secret, shared between them, shining in their eyes as they made their bargains, and the old ladies standing innocently by.

That evening, as he was relating his experiences to his friend at the house of the latter, the postman brought a dainty note, addressed in pretty handwriting to Mr. Hansard.

"Which of us shall open it?" said George. "It is addressed to you."

"But it is meant for you."

It was opened and found to contain information of the fact that Miss Featherstonhaugh, having obtained the situation she sought as assistant fowl-cultivator with the ladies in Sussex, was to start for Daisy Farm on the following morning.

"And I shall at once set to work," she said, "to fatten the best pair of chickens for you."

IV.

WINTERY sunlight was streaming over the downs, flittering through the bare brown woods of Sussex. The roads were covered with snow, the ponds with ice, all the little paths leading through the Daisy Farm were slippery and dangerous, and a bright glow of firelight shone through the wide window of the quaint old parlour. Upstairs in a large old-fashioned room four figures were squatted on the floor, bending eagerly with faces full of anxiety over a square box which stood in the centre of the apartment. Was this some grotesque wooden idol, all the more sacred because so shapeless, and were these the isolated worshippers of some secret paganism? Or was the object—yes, it was an incubator.

The three worshippers were Miss Priscilla, Miss Anne, and Miss Sophy Hyde, with their new assistant, a girl with the peculiar and appropriate name of Hen.

"You see it is quite new to us all, my dear," said Miss Priscilla, a tall, thin, determined-looking lady, with white cork-screw curls and the narrowest of black gowns; "but it is interesting to think that a vast fortune is enclosed for us within these four little wooden walls. It is quite awful to take up your pen and make a calculation of the number of living creatures one can conjure out of this inanimate thing in a year, to enrich ourselves and increase the supply of food for mankind."

"It makes my head go round," murmured Miss Sophy, who had rosy cheeks, and misty blue eyes that peered mildly through spectacles.

"Had we not better proceed to turn the

eggs?" said Miss Anne, a sharp-featured, good-humoured woman, who was the most practical of the three sisters.

"All in good time," said Miss Priscilla, asserting her right to lead, and looking round for the books which Miss Anne placed in her lap. "Shall we take French or English advice?" she continued, looking from one to another of the open volumes before her.

"The whole thing is French manufacture," said Miss Anne; "but French or English, there is only one way of turning eggs."

"Pardon, sister," said Miss Priscilla. "If we were to turn them merely in our character of human beings that might be so, but we are called upon to play the part of mother hens. Twice in twenty-four hours the hen scratches about with her claws and turns the eggs in a manner peculiar to herself. Let us consider how best to imitate her movements. Hen, my dear, this is a part you will have to perform every day. You had better begin at once."

Hen, prettier than ever in a large white apron that covered her from shoulders to ankles, advanced upon her knees to the open drawer of the incubator, and began a light scrambling movement with her little fingers among the eggs, making them roll over, and change places with each other, without crack or breakage.

"Good!" said Miss Priscilla, patting her cheek. "It must have been some pre-
vision in your god-parents that made them name you Hen. A special providence has sent you to us."

A large black kettle was now introduced, and the four ladies were enveloped in clouds of steam, looking more than ever like priestesses of some mysterious rite looming through incense, while the reservoir of the incubator was solemnly and cautiously refilled with boiling water.

"Ah!" said Miss Priscilla, retiring to her desk in the window, and laying the tip of her penholder against the bridge of her nose, while she mused aloud. "What a calculation I have made, my fellow-workers! Fifty chicks of a costly breed at present within the incubator, value, when fattened, at least ten shillings apiece! Total, twenty-five pounds. Each incubator will produce twenty-five pounds within twenty-one days. More than four hundred a year out of one incubator, my dear; and is there any reason why we should not multiply our incubators? Suppose we have twenty incubators. I will just ask you,

Anne, to calculate the amount of the riches that are about to flow in upon us."

"It makes my head go round," repeated Miss Sophy.

"I am afraid to put a name upon it," said Miss Priscilla. "I never was of a grasping nature. Our gains might be almost limitless were we servers of Mammon; but I, for one, will be content to stop short at ten thousand a year."

"Don't count your chickens before they're hatched!" said Miss Anne with sardonic good humour.

"You were always a doubter," said Miss Priscilla; "but I shall be glad if you can tell me where the hitch can come from now! I can prove my case to you in black and white."

"In the first place, how do you expect to afford to buy twenty incubators?"

"That, I grant you, is a difficulty with our straitened means; but time will arrange all. Out of the produce of each drawerful of eggs, we can take the price of an incubator, or perhaps two."

"The price of twenty would be eighty pounds," said Hen.

"Exactly," said Miss Priscilla.

"And twenty incubators, worth four hundred pounds a year each, would realise—"

Hen took out her pocket-book and scribbled.

"I am delighted to find you so accurate and businesslike, my dear," said Miss Priscilla, who thought she saw her making calculations with her pencil; but what Hen wrote was as follows :

"MY DEAR GUARDIAN,—Please send, by to-morrow's post, a bank bill for one hundred pounds, addressed to Miss Hyde at this place, with a line stating that it is conscience-money, due to her father's daughter, from one who wishes to remain unknown.—Yours, 'HEN.'

Next morning, as the Miss Hydes sat at breakfast in their pretty old parlour, while the robins fed outside the wide window on the crumbs spread for them on the snow, the hundred-pound bill dropped out of a letter on Miss Priscilla's plate.

"More than the price of twenty incubators!" she cried in joy and amazement. "Oh, how our dear father must have been cheated by someone! Now, indeed, sisters, our fortunes must be made."

The twenty incubators were ordered from France, and then arose a question of where to put them, and by what contri-

vance they were to be replenished twice a day with boiling water.

"We must have a large outhouse built for the purpose of their accommodation," said Miss Priscilla, "and furnished with a copper to hold a constant supply of water on the boil."

"And an unlimited amount of coal," said Miss Anne. "Meantime, I should be glad to see one of our egg-shells chipped."

"I have just been looking," said Miss Sophy, "but I see no chip as yet."

"You must not look too frequently," said Miss Priscilla. "It is highly dangerous to open the drawer often."

"Would the eggs explode?" asked Hen.

"No, my dear; but too many puffs of cool air might blight the little lives within the shells."

"Then a drawerful may be easily lost?"

"Most easily."

"Twenty-five pounds gone!" said Miss Anne.

"Anne," said Miss Priscilla gently, "do not look so unkindly on the gloomy side of things. You damp one's spirits."

v.

THE snow had vanished away, and within the large kitchen-garden at Daisy Farm all the fruit-trees had burst into blossom. Wreaths of pink and white foamy bloom draped the high walls and the apple and cherry trees. All along the back of one wall a large shed had been built and thatched over, and within this stood the twenty incubators and the copper for boiling water.

Hen had just emerged from this building, and was walking down the path of the garden, driving a little flock of yellow chicks before her with a sallow wand. A broad shepherdess-hat sheltered her head from the already brilliant sun, and the dreaded coarse strong shoes encased her little feet. She was a picture of the goose-girl in the story. Miss Priscilla Hyde lifted the latch of the kitchen-garden door and ushered in a gentleman whom Hen's heart recognised with a bound.

Said Miss Priscilla :

"This is Mr. Hansard, who visited us before, and is a connoisseur of poultry. He desires to add to his collection by selections from our stock. I must leave him to your care for a short time, and will return as soon as possible."

As soon as she was gone, the connoisseur

gazed merrily in the eyes of the little hen-wife.

"Well, how goes it all, my most wilful ward?"

"Beautifully. Just look at my flock of fifty chicks!"

"Fifty chicks! After a struggle of three months, and an outlay of two hundred pounds!"

"Well, sir, what would you have? We are only at the beginning of our career."

"I visited, on my way here, a lady who has produced a hundred fine fowl since Christmas, and never saw an incubator."

"She must be a narrow-minded person. I tell you we are looking to the future."

"And how many more hundred-pound bills will you spend before the future begins to arrive?"

"Your views are sordid, Mr. Hansard."

"And yours are visionary."

"I tell you I will not have my dear old ladies disappointed. Besides, you know, I am laying up a provision for my own old age. I shall take all this off their hands after they have succeeded to my fortune."

"That is, if you do not marry Mr. George Gainsborough."

"If! Mr. Hansard, if you only came here to insult me, I beg you will take your departure at once."

"All in good time. He told me he had paid you a visit here, also as a connoisseur."

"Oh yes, and how delighted dear Miss Priscilla was! 'My dear, all the connoisseurs are finding us out,' she said to me. 'It must be a lucky omen.'"

"He made a good hit on that occasion, I understand; was able to be very useful to you."

"The wretch! he dared to prescribe for our ailing nursery, and poisoned them all."

"What?"

"I was sitting on one side of the parlour fire, and Miss Sophy on the other, and we had each a poor sick dear of a chick rolled up in hot flannel in our laps. That was bad enough, as the poor little martyrs ought to have been out pecking about in the fresh air instead of being roasted alive at the fire. Divers draperies were hanging up in irregular places to screen the gasping creatures from the breath of air that would have given them life. In came Mr. Gainsborough, the audacious creature, to persecute me even in my obscurity. He pretended to know all about the diseases of chickens, and advised me to give them pills of cayenne pepper and butter. We obeyed him, and dosed our chicks to death.

The cayenne pepper finished their miserable career, and what a wretched evening that was after he left! Miss Sophy and I wept over our murdered chicks."

"I begin to fear poor Gainsborough was born under an unlucky star; but let us forget both him and the chickens for a little while. Do you know, I find this garden the most perfect Paradise I ever entered. Was the sky ever so blue before, or were fruit blossoms ever so fresh and beautiful? I could imagine this the Garden of Eden, and you and me the only creatures inhabiting it."

Hen looked up at him radiantly.

"Don't, please," she said; "don't distract my mind from my business. You are a guardian and I am a hen-wife. A hen-wife at so much wages per week knows nothing about Gardens of Eden."

"But when that person at so much per week creates the Garden of Eden around her? At this moment I cannot imagine a Paradise without a hen-wife in it."

"This moment! And the next?"

"This moment and for ever are the same to my mind. I have seen a vision of happiness that may melt away as the blossoms will vanish from these exquisite trees. Should it be so, I am a broken man. I—"

"Here is Miss Priscilla," said Hen, smiling mischievously, while she slyly dashed off a happy tear from her eyelashes.

"Hang Miss Priscilla!" muttered the supposed connoisseur.

"I have been consulting my practical sister Anne," said Miss Hyde, "and she agrees with me that it will be better to keep the fowls for you a little longer, and to let them be well grown and fattened before they are transferred to a new home."

"Capital idea!" said George, greatly relieved to think he need not yet pay the awkward penalty of his visits.

"Our little maid here will take good care of them for you. And, perhaps, you will come soon again to have a look at their progress!"

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"You and another gentleman connoisseur have agreed to take the entire flock from us. I think you know Mr. Gainsborough. Perhaps you will come together some day?"

"No," said Hen, stamping her little foot.

"My dear!" said Miss Priscilla, in amazed remonstrance.

"I hate him!" said Hen. "He—he

poisoned our baby-chicks with cayenne pepper."

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And then she carried the connoisseur away with her, and the hen-wife was left alone in the kitchen-garden, staring at the bloom-covered fruit-trees in a dream, while the chicks pecked about, and ran where they ought not to go, and their mistress thought blissfully and a little anxiously of what their new owner had said about Paradise.

VI.

A WEEK later Miss Sophy and Hen were busy among the incubators enveloped in clouds of steam. The drawers had been visited and the eggs inspected and turned.

"I begin to fear with Anne," whispered Miss Sophy, "that our fortunes will not be made as rapidly as Priscilla thinks. Here we have all this expensive machinery, and after all the village schoolmistress has as many fowls as we have. And she never saw a wooden mother but ours in her life."

"I don't believe much in the good of fortunes," said Hen sagely. "If we all amuse ourselves, and get enough bread-and-butter to eat, what does it matter about the rest?"

"You are young and strong," said Miss Sophy, "and it is all fun to you. But I may say to you with the frogs, 'What is play to you is death to us.' We are getting, at least Priscilla is getting old, and we were delicately reared and brought up to expect a provision for our latter days. All our lives we were taught to expect a fortune to come to us."

"Indeed!" said Hen. "Do tell me about it, dear Miss Sophy."

"You are such a sympathetic creature I don't mind, though Priscilla and Anne would be so angry if they knew. The fact is, a fortune which is ours by right, has been willed away to a little chit of an American girl, and we are left out in the cold. She is in America, and we don't know anything about her. Sisters are so proud they never would make the smallest enquiry. Shut themselves up from all knowledge concerning her. But it is a little hard, is it not?"

"Shameful!" said Hen. "Couldn't it be taken from her?"

"Oh no, no. Nor would we wish it. Only there might have been shares. However, don't speak or think of it, my dear. I am only afraid now that we may lose our little 'all' in this venture after so many frugal and laborious years."

"You shall have the money, poor dears," thought Hen. "Oh, to think of that monster Gainsborough grasping to get it! I shall take care he does not, however. Ah, here he is!" as the door of the kitchen-garden opened and the supposed George Gainsborough, the real Hansard, entered.

"Here is one of our connoisseurs," said Miss Sophy, adjusting her spectacles. "And here is the other," she added, as the real George appeared behind him. "Well, I think we may safely deliver them their pretty flocks to-day."

Miss Priscilla and Miss Anne followed the gentlemen into the garden, for a solemn and memorable moment was at hand—the moment when the firstlings of their flock, the darlings they had cherished and tended, were to be bartered into the custody of strangers. All moved on in a solemn procession round the garden, the sisters and Hen, and the connoisseurs, towards the hen-house. Miss Priscilla purposely lingered and prolonged the walk, pointing out certain super-excellent fruit-trees, and descanting on lettuces, cauliflowers and parsley, with a weak desire to put off the evil day, and to delay the final parting with the feathered nurslings.

Meantime, the supposed Gainsborough, the real Hansard, grave, dignified, with his most solemn and formal manner, assumed for the occasion, contrived to place himself beside Hen and to detach himself a little from the party.

"Miss Featherstonhaugh," he began, "I implore you to listen to me. Only think of the undignified position in which you have placed me. I am here under false pretences, deceiving these amiable ladies, all to have an opportunity of pleading my cause with you."

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"Have you seriously thought of how you can bear poverty for the rest of your life? If you accept me for a husband, as your poor dear uncle arranged, you shall have every pleasure in the world, all your desires gratified."

"I have no desires, and I don't want them gratified," said Hen incoherently. "I only wish to see you no more, and to

have done with all mention of that weary money which has been the plague of my existence. It will not go to loss, sir, even though neither you nor I touch it. It is delightful to me to think of the astonishment of these dear friends whom I have learned to love when the unexpected wealth drops down upon them."

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"It is all the fault of that good-for-nothing guardian of yours," growled the supposed suitor. "Having so silly a creature to deal with he ought to have managed better."

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"Try."

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"I could."

"My darling! I have loved you since the first moment of our meeting."

"I have hoped so."

"Then you love me?"

"I have felt from the first as if I belonged to you. I never could bear to belong to anyone else."

He caught the little hand hanging by her side and held it; and they walked on blissfully between the gooseberry bushes.

The latch of the kitchen-garden door was lifted, and two ladies in showy garments fluttered into the place.

"Some lady connoisseurs," said Miss Priscilla, smiling complacently, and as the new comers advanced to meet her, the whole company assembled and came to a stop upon a grass plot under a rosy fret-work of apple-blossoms.

After greeting the Miss Hydes, one of the ladies turned smilingly on the real George, saying: "Ah, Mr. Gainsborough, so glad to see you here! Who would have thought of meeting you among the poultry?"

The other lady turned to the false Gainsborough, saying: "How do you do, Mr. Hansard? Are you also a fancier of fowls?"

"Are they both dreaming?" thought Hen. "They have got the names, yet misplaced them strangely."

The Miss Hydes gazed gravely at their visitors, ladies and gentlemen, and the latter looked startled and disturbed.

After a few constrained remarks the whole party moved towards the hen-house once more, that the ladies might see the feathered flock before they were sent off upon their journey. George Gainsborough and the elder lady who had greeted him so warmly walked together, and Hen, who followed, could not help hearing every word they said.

"Is it possible you are not married yet," said the lady in a shrill high voice, "and only a week of the time remaining? What are you delaying about? Is the American heiress as delightful as we all hope she may be? I am glad, at all events, to see you have Mr. Hansard taking care of you. He will see that the good fortune does not slip through your fingers. If you disappoint us I shall never forgive you; I have several bets on the matter."

"Oh!" groaned George inwardly; "if anyone had swooped down on me rather than this vulgar woman! Why did I ever make her acquaintance? And how has she learned so much of my affairs?"

Hen, walking behind, received all the shrill-voiced woman's words into her bewildered brain, and gradually a light broke upon her.

When the hen-house was reached, and the Miss Hydes and the lady connoisseurs entered it, she touched Gainsborough on the arm, and as he turned to confront her she gazed at him full in the eyes.

"Who are you?" she said with a stern frown on her fair brow.

"I am George Gainsborough," said our hero, half defiantly half deprecatingly.

"And he?" indicating his friend.

"Your guardian, Mr. Hansard."

She shrank away from them both, threw out her hands with a repellent gesture, and turned and fled away out of the garden.

"You have gone a little too far," said Hansard to his companion. "What a pity you did not take my advice and explain all to her a week ago."

George was too much overwhelmed by his misfortune to make any answer.

VII.

"No, I will never speak to, never see either of them again," said Hen. She was sitting at the open window of her own little room at the farm, looking out with a pale determined face at the wealth of fruit blossoms that had helped to make the world so beautiful only a few hours ago. Now nothing was beautiful, not even Hen's face with that angry frown upon it.

"I have been grossly, hatefully deceived," she continued, while Miss Sophy stood before her wringing her plump hands and gazing at her in wonder and dismay.

"My dear, you must change your mind," said Miss Sophy, "the young man really loves you with all his heart, and, only think, what could sisters and I do with all this money that you are going to fling out of your hands? If it were a matter of five or six hundred a year to make our old age comfortable; but to think of such heaps of riches coming down upon us! It will spoil our peace of mind for ever, and deprive us of the rest we could enjoy. We shall feel bound to go hunting about the world for worthy objects upon which to expend it, instead of sitting down to repose in the evening of our days."

"Dear Miss Sophy, you can give it, if you like, to the first beggar-man you meet. I will never touch a penny of it. Neither shall he—mean, false that he has proved. Oh," bursting into tears, "to think that I

should have made such a hero of him, and loved him so well!"

Miss Anne knocked at the door and came in.

"My dear Henrietta, your guardian, Mr. Hansard, desires to have a word with you."

"Miss Anne, I will not go near him. My guardian, Mr. Hansard! Who is he? How do I know whether there is any Mr. Hansard in the world at all? I thought I knew my guardian, and he has proved to be that odious——"

"My young friend," said Miss Anne, "when you have done raving I will take back your message to your uncle's friend. But, let me tell you, I will countenance no impertinence from a chit like you to so dignified and estimable a gentleman."

Hen stared.

To be spoken to like this was entirely new to her.

"He deceived me," she said, "and I have no reason to respect him. He will want me to marry that detestable——"

"Do not speak falsehoods," said Miss Anne severely. "You know you do not think him detestable. Some women would gladly bestow good things on the man whom they love. But that is as you please. No one is going to force you. One thing, however, you are bound to do—that is, to treat your guardian with proper consideration. And I advise you to descend with me instantly as he desires."

Hen's eyes flashed defiance; and then she suddenly changed her mind.

"Yes, I will go to him," she said. "It will be a relief to tell him what I think of them both."

Mr. Hansard was waiting for her alone in Miss Hyde's nice old parlour, the three sisters having retired to Miss Priscilla's chamber to talk over the curious discovery of the day, and to try to steady their poor old brains, which were almost overturned at the likelihood of having the responsibility of enormous wealth thrust upon them in their latter days. That the obliging little hen-girl should prove to be their own kinswoman, the objectionable American heiress who had for so many years deprived them of the competency they had had a right to, was astonishing enough, but the girl's fantastic wilfulness and obstinacy, and her tender regard for them, her utter disregard for her own interests and unmerciful harshness towards her lover, all went to make up a still greater wonder in their minds. How would it end? they asked themselves; and in the

meantime Hen had confronted her guardian in the parlour.

"I can have neither respect nor regard for you, nor for Mr. Gainsborough," Hen was saying excitedly—"never any more. You have deceived me basely, for the purpose of obtaining a fortune for him."

"My dear child," said Mr. Hansard gently, "we shall never get on if you give way to passion. I begin to think, indeed, that my friend has had a lucky escape."

"Escape?"

"Yes, certainly. You do not suppose I am going to press this marriage upon him, or you? I merely wish to discuss the future with you—to learn what you intend to do with yourself after this day week, when the Miss Hydes will take possession of your uncle's wealth, and you will have to do something for yourself."

All the light and colour had vanished from Hen's face. She grew very pale and hung her head.

"As for our deception, I will just remind you that it was you who first deceived. You sent a false photograph, and represented yourself as altogether different from what you are. In justice to myself and friend, I am bound to say, while admitting that we fell into a mistake, that our deception was, at all events in the first instance, unpremeditated. You mistook him for me, finding him alone by accident in my study. His wrong-doing in this case lay in the fact that he was silly enough to fall in love with you. Love, and love alone, prompted him to the course of conduct he has followed, and which I deeply regret I was weak enough to countenance."

Hen raised her head to speak, but was checked by Mr. Hansard's uplifted hand.

"I know what you would say," he said, "but do not attempt to utter it. I will not hear a calumny upon the noblest fellow that breathes. So far from plotting to gain your wealth, he said to me that, if you pleased, he would wait till the stipulated time should have expired, and the riches have been foregone, and that working at his profession he could be happy with your love."

"He said that?" murmured Hen, a tear starting to her eye.

"And meant it. I thought his a far-fetched overstrained nobility of feeling in the matter, though I could not help respecting him for it. I knew he had dreamed of a Parliamentary career, for which he is admirably suited, and I regretted that the vain selfishness, the utter want of genero-

sity, in the woman he had so oddly set his heart upon should be the cause of ruining the fine prospect my late dear old friend had meant to open up for him."

"Mr. Hansard!" cried Hen, fixing a pair of dismayed imploring eyes upon him.

"Yes, my dear; it is well that you should hear the truth for once. You have thought only of yourself, and have cared nothing about blighting the life of another. As you have chosen, however, there is nothing more to be said. I think, upon the whole, it may be better to defer our further conversation to a day when you may be better able to hear it. At present you seem rather disturbed. Good morning."

He bowed himself out, and Hen stood musing silently alone for some moments, then suddenly, with a wild cry, fled from the parlour and out of the house.

At some distance there was a little shady grove, seldom visited, where one might hope to give free vent unobserved to a passion of remorse and grief, or an agony of disappointed love; and thither the trembling girl began to run as fast as her young fleet limbs could carry her.

As fate would have it, however, another person was at this moment in possession of the grove, walking up and down among the trees with bent head and folded arms, awaiting a signal from the lawyer, who was to wave his stick from the road when ready to depart for the train.

Hen, with eyes blinded by tears, did not see this person till she rushed up against him. The next moment she was gazing at him pitifully, her two hands clasped fast in his.

"Oh George, George! Is it too late? I mean for the Parliamentary career."

"Hang the Parliamentary career!" said George joyfully.

But they were married before the week was over; and the Miss Hydes have escaped the affliction of enormous wealth in their declining days, though they are at present in the enjoyment of an ample income.

AUNT AGATHA'S CONVERSION.

BY R. D. BRIGHTWELL

CHAPTER I.

"WHIP it!" said my aunt.

With kerchief pinned over her well-developed bust, and apron tied round her figure, she was engaged in manufacturing a batch of lemon-cheesecakes for which the

materials had been brought into her neat little "keeping-room;" and, just as with sleeves tucked up (she was rather proud of her beautiful arm) she was immersed in the mysteries of rolling, and patting, and buttering tins, and lining them with crust, glancing out of the window, she had seen the immaculate carriage of Miss Tipple stopping at the door, and a gentleman handing out that spruce and dainty little personage.

Poor Betsy Ward, Aunt Agatha's only servant, had likewise taken a stealthy peep, and she now hustled into the room.

"Lor', mum," said she, "there's Miss Tipple and a strange gentleman; let me clear away the things while you go and make yourself tidy. They can knock again, and I'll have 'em away in a minute."

"No, Betsy," said my aunt, "Miss Tipple knows very well that I make my own pastry, and when she comes to see me she must just take me as I am. There, open the door."

And she complacently went on with her rolling and patting.

The fact is, Aunt Agatha had no great opinion of Miss Tipple. Herself, though very limited as to income, the representative of one of the oldest and most respected families in Hilderstock, she did not consider that Miss Tipple, whose father she remembered as a well-to-do grocer, was at all lifted to an equality with her by her wealth, and she had not formed a very exalted estimate of Miss Tipple's sincerity or of her discretion, so that when she now entered the room Aunt Agatha, quite undisturbed by her rich and irreproachable costume, looked at her coolly, as who should say: "I've taken the measure of you, my lady, and I don't think much of you."

"You'd better not come too near me," said Aunt Agatha as Miss Tipple advanced, putting out a pretty little neatly-gloved hand, "for, you see, I'm all over flour. But those that fear feathers shouldn't go among wild fowl."

"My dear Miss Gayfer," said Miss Tipple, who always placed a strong emphasis on her adjectives, "you are so perfectly fresh and natural that it is always charming to see you; so unlike the artificial world which is made up of show. Let me introduce to you Mr. Jordan, my cousin, our new rector. I am sure you will be delighted with him."

My aunt acknowledged by a word or two the new rector's salutation, took a

good look at him, and didn't feel by any means so sure about it.

He was a tall pale man, much marked with small-pox, with crisp black hair, and he spoke in a low, mellow, cooing voice, which most women found it pleasant to listen to.

"I trust, Miss Gayfer," said he, "that we shall be very good friends. I understand that you are a recognised power in Hilderstock, and that your co-operation is quite essential to success here."

"If you had said that I am pretty well known here, where I have spent my life," said Aunt Agatha, "you would have been well within the mark; as to influence, you'll find that our people have, most of 'em, got a will of their own—and it's generally wrong."

"That's a less flattering description of my parishioners than I have had from my cousin," said he with a smile.

"Ah well, you'll see. The proof of the pudding is in the eating. I don't mean to say but what they are honest enough and good-natured. But they are shiftless and wilful, so that it's very hard to help them."

"I am sure, my dear Miss Gayfer," said Miss Tipple, "that your example and your instructions have gone far to cure them of both those faults; and I know you will appreciate Frank, my cousin, who is the most methodical man in the world. He has made an absolute conquest of the Blackmans, and the Wilkinses, and the Wakelings."

"Aye," said Aunt Agatha, with a laugh, "new brooms sweep clean."

"Of one thing you may be quite sure, Frank," said Miss Tipple, turning to her cousin: "Miss Gayfer will always tell you what she thinks."

"I certainly shan't tell Mr. Jordan, nor anybody else, what I don't think," said Aunt Agatha; "but all truths are not to be told."

Presently, when the cheesecakes were finished and the apparatus dismissed, Miss Tipple said:

"You really must let my cousin see your exquisite fernery, Miss Gayfer. You have such perfect taste in all these matters, and manage them so admirably."

"It runs in the blood," said my aunt, not insensible to the flattery. "My father was very fond of his garden, and she that comes of a hen must scrape. But I've scarcely any pleasure to go into my garden now, since Miss Payne has stuck up that abominable red-brick wall at the end of it.

It scorches my eyes to look upon it. It's not much after all," she said, turning to Mr. Jordan, "but such as it is, come and see it."

She led the way up the steps which climbed into the garden from the back door, between the dwarf yews and magnificent trees of blush roses, old-fashioned but sweet as the odours of a dream, and turning down to a little dell where dwarf ivy and periwinkle clambered over artfully-disposed rocks, presented her pretty little fernery, lush and delicate in its verdure, and delicious in its coolness.

Mr. Jordan examined it with a critical eye.

"Excellent, Miss Gayfer," said he, stooping down as he spoke to examine the soil. "But these scolopendriums would do better if you would give them some sandy loam mixed with leaf-mould."

"The man has a grain of gumption in him, after all," said my aunt, *sotto voce*, but not so low as to be inaudible to a little nephew whose hand she held, and who, having a sense of humour, very imperfectly succeeded in stifling a laugh, as he caught Miss Tipple's eye fixed upon him. There was an awkward hush for a second or two, and in the pause the sound of shears was distinctly audible.

My aunt gathered up her skirts with inimitable speed, and proceeded to investigate, followed more leisurely by the cousins, who seemed to be exchanging confidences in a complacent and affectionate manner, till they were startled by the indignant tones of my aunt's voice exclaiming:

"Hi! you man, what are you doing there? How dare you?"

On the opposite side of the garden rose the hideous red-brick building which had excited my aunt's righteous indignation. Just struggling up to reach this had been a magnificent crop of ivy; but the place thereof knew it no more, for a man who stood there, open-mouthed, with his shears in his hand, and with the spoils of his labour all round him, had sheared and trimmed it till the wall was as bare as a billiard-ball.

My aunt had followed up her exclamation by rushing across the garden, seizing the intruder by the collar of his jacket, and shaking him till his teeth chattered in his head.

"Come away, Frank, come away!" said Miss Tipple, plucking the new rector's sleeve. "The woman must be mad."

But Mr. Jordan, without heeding the injunction, with a smile on his face, strode to the scene of the conflict, just as my aunt, fairly out of breath, released poor Jobson in a condition of extreme physical exhaustion and mental bewilderment.

"Oh, it's you, Jobson, is it?" she said, as soon as she had sufficiently recovered breath. "How dare you come trespassing here, and destroying my garden? You touch another leaf of that ivy, sir, and I'll make you smart for it, or my name is not Agatha Gayfer."

There was scarcely a leaf left for him to touch: he had done his work completely.

"Well," she continued impatiently, "what do you stand there for, with your mouth open, like a drivelling idiot? Have you got nothing to say for yourself?"

"Why, lord, Miss Gayfer," said Jobson, "you right down skeer me, that you do; I han't had sich a jouncing not sin' I was tossed in a blanket. I never knowed I was doin' any harm. Miss Payne she said the ivory made her walls damp, and I was to come over and cut it. She towld me, and I thought it was all right. I never knowed I was doing any harm. Why, lor', there—"

"And are you such a born fool, then, as to go and do whatever Miss Payne tells you? Don't you know I could have you prosecuted and imprisoned for trespass and wilful damage? and I don't know but what I shall, too. He that will needs blow in the dust must look to fill his eyes with it. Now you go and tell Miss Payne, that if she's got anything to say by way of excuse, she had better say it at once, or it may be too late."

"Sakes! Miss Gayfer," began Jobson, "I never—"

"Don't stand talking there, man, but go and do as I tell you."

The unhappy Jobson gathered up his tools, climbed up the short ladder by which he had made his descent, drew it after him, and disappeared.

"It's a most vexatious incident," said the new rector.

"Vexatious!" interrupted my aunt with perfectly recovered composure, "it's mad-dening."

There was a curious contrast between the words and the tone in which they were uttered, and the rector smiled as he said:

"I hope, after the first natural ebullition of feeling, you will be able to accommodate your difference with this Miss Payne amicably."

"Oh, fiddle-de-dee!" said my aunt. "But there now, good-bye. I shall see you—on Sunday."

"My dear Miss Gayfer," said Miss Tipple, "your energy of character quite astonishes me! I could no more do what you have done, than I could write Frank's sermons for him."

"It's just as well the world holds a few people who have some control over themselves," said my aunt with a laugh.

"That's a remarkable woman," said Mr. Jordan as he drove away with Miss Tipple.

"A remarkably disagreeable woman," said the lady with a little shudder.

"Do you think so?" said the new rector, and both lapsed into silence.

"Those people mean to make a match of it," said my aunt as she waited for Miss Payne. "Love and a cough, they say, can't be hid, and anyone can see that she has made up her mind to marry him. A pretty dance she'll lead him, too, poor fellow."

Miss Payne was a lady of ponderous build, but short in proportion to her bulk, with a complexion like an uncooked muffin, and eyes in a chronic state of moisture, apt to overflow on slight provocation. She was elephantine in her movements, wheezy and faint in her voice, and lachrymose in her general views. Aunt Agatha, who had been chirping merrily, straightened herself in her chair as the click of the front gate announced the approach of this obnoxious personage.

"Well!" exclaimed my aunt as she waddled into the room.

"Oh-h-h!" sobbed Miss Payne, sinking uninvited into a chair.

My aunt eyed her with profound contempt, but gave her time to recover breath before she asked:

"Well, Miss Payne, have you anything to say why I should not put this matter in the hands of my lawyer, and take proceedings against you for your abominable trespass?"

"Miss Agatha!" gasped the offender, "I declare you frighten me, and my heart is that bad—"

"Stuff!" said Aunt Agatha promptly.

"Only think, Miss Agatha, what's the use of going to law with me—"

"I know," broke in my aunt, "that whether you boil snow or pound it, you get only water; but to put up with such an abominable outrage as this is to invite injury. Those that make themselves sheep have no call to complain if the wolf eats them."

"My dear Miss Agatha," pleaded Miss Payne.

"Don't 'dear Miss Agatha' me, woman," said my aunt; "it makes me sick."

"I declare, Miss Agatha, I'm more vexed than you can think. You know damp makes me so miserable."

"I don't know," said my aunt abruptly.

"It does, really, and the ivy did make the wall damp."

"Then you should have told me about it, and not sent people trespassing in my garden."

"I never thought, Miss Agatha, Jobson was going to do so much. I told him just to trim the ivy so that it didn't make the wall damp."

"I don't believe it," said my aunt. "I know Jobson very well, and you told him to cut it down or he wouldn't have done so, and you made him believe that I knew all about it."

"I didn't really, Miss Agatha; no, really, I didn't. When I saw what he'd done, you might have knocked me down with a feather. I'm so sorry you were annoyed—"

"Annoyed!" said my aunt, with vehemence. "Miss Payne, I could have skinned you!"

Poor Miss Payne gave a start of such unmistakable alarm that my aunt's sense of the comic overmastered her indignation, and she broke into laughter, after which she felt that it was quite hopeless to prolong the interview, and she accordingly brought it to an abrupt close, saying:

"Well, Miss Payne, it's no use crying over spilt milk. I don't forgive you yet, and it's no use pretending that I do, but I will not say anything more about this affair. But if ever you do such a thing again I won't spare you, mind that."

"Ah now, Miss Agatha," said the old lady, gathering spirit with this promise, "don't half do the thing while you are about it. Let us be friendly and neighbourly."

"We may come to that in time," was the reply. "He's a fool that asks much, and he's more fool that grants it. I feel very sore about this matter, I can tell you, and I shall take a week and a day to get over it. And now the less that's said about it the more likely I shall be to forget it, so good-bye."

Miss Payne gasped, heaved her deepest sigh, shook her underdone head, and waddled off.

CHAPTER II.

AUNT AGATHA pronounced Mr. Jordan's first sermon "very sensible," and wondered what such a man could see in that "mincing affected little bit of goods, Miss Tipple."

But as the weeks went by she did not hear of him quite in the way she liked in the cottages where she visited, and she heard of him a good deal more than she liked in a parson of the parish at garden-parties, archery-meetings, and social gatherings of various kinds. Not that he failed to visit among the humbler inhabitants of Hilderstock, but while she heard of him as smoking his pipe with them, talking about their gardens, or their pigs and their poultry, and otherwise rendering himself very popular, he never seemed to speak to them of religion or about purely professional topics.

This was very different from the practice of the late rector, a zealous evangelical, whose dutiful disciple Aunt Agatha had been, though in her sturdy independence she had sometimes ventured to express her doubt as to the wisdom of prolonged exhortations in houses where the struggle for existence was hard and exacting, for, as she would say, "you can't make a windmill go with a pair of bellows."

Something between the prolixity of his predecessor and the too purely mundane converse of Mr. Jordan would have been her idea of the happy mean.

"I have just been telling Mrs. Gimpson," said he one day when he encountered her at the door of a cottage, "that if she wants her hens to lay she must vary their food a little."

"Don't you think there are some things more important than hens' eggs you might speak to Nanny Gimpson about?" asked my aunt, looking him full in the face. "I'm afraid she's dreadfully ignorant, and they say parsons are souls' waggoners."

"Do you know, Miss Gayfer," he answered, "that when I see that cheerful, active old lady, stricken with pain and with years, making the thinnest of livelihoods by unremitting care, yet always contented, I feel that it is for me to learn and be silent; she is the teacher."

My aunt was silent for a second or two, and then answered: "There is a great deal in what you say, but it is a way of looking at things that is new to me. If it is the right way, I think I have wasted a good deal of time."

"Assuredly not," said he, "you have carried brightness and order into many

homes, and wherever I go I find you have been an influence for good. Sympathy is the true 'open sesame' to a human heart, and in power of sympathy we men lag far behind women."

From that time a gradual change was observable in Aunt Agatha's dealings with the poor folk whom she visited. It would have been difficult to say exactly what it was. A more frequent touch of tenderness, a greater readiness to make allowances for the circumstances and difficulties of each. A greater readiness to help there could not be, but there was less readiness to scold.

Sometimes, in the course of her indefatigable rounds, she would meet with and have pleasant converse with the rector, and would come home quite radiant with pleasure. At other times she only heard of him as having been the life and soul of some party, rowing Miss Tipple and her friends down the river, organising picnics and other frivolities on which Aunt Agatha looked with scant toleration.

"That man," she remarked one day, "might put new life into the whole parish, and he's becoming a mere butterfly. It's bad enough now; what it will be after he gets married to that shallow, worldly-minded woman, Heaven only knows."

One day in early autumn, as Aunt Agatha was moving softly among her asters and chrysanthemums, musing probably of these matters, a harsh crashing noise and a shock as of earthquake rudely broke the current of her reflections. She turned in the direction from which the sound had come, and there, where Miss Payne's flaunting eyesore of a red-brick upper storey had been, was a cloud of dust, momentily thinning, and leaving the clear blue of a bright October sky.

"A good riddance of bad rubbish," was Aunt Agatha's brief exclamation; but then, the possibilities involved suddenly flashing upon her mind, she added: "Heaven forgive me! Why, the woman and that poor little half-starved Lucy Chalk may be buried in those ruins!"

In an instant she was rushing out of her garden, bonnet flying behind her, quite unconscious of the amazed look of the butcher over the way, the group of milliners at Miss Firmin's, and the portly landlord of the Red Lion, who, ignorant as they were of what had transpired at the rear of Aunt Agatha's dwelling, were half amused and half curious about her deshabille and her haste.

"Here! hi!" she called to two men

who were passing. "Jobson, Tyler, come with me to Miss Payne's directly. There has been an accident there; the new storey has fallen in."

Hastening with them round the corner of Horn Lane, she came upon Miss Tipple, escorted by the rector, with whom she was gaily conversing.

"My dear Miss Gayfer!" said Miss Tipple, advancing with her everlasting wintry smile.

"What is the matter, Miss Gayfer?" asked Mr. Jordan. "Can I help you?"

Just then a small boy came running by, and thinking he might be useful to run errands, Aunt Agatha impounded him by clutching the collar of his jacket, a piece of his ear, and a handful of his hair, holding him in firm grasp while she explained to the rector briefly what had happened.

"You may as well come," she added, "though I don't know you can do anything. Better a lame foot than none."

And without further parley she hurried on.

Miss Tipple, who clung to the rector's arm, and with a soft invincibility declined either to hurry her steps or to be left to herself, so impeded his motion that Aunt Agatha, with her followers, was out of sight in no time. When at last he came up, half dragging the shrinking and reluctant Miss Tipple, whose strong objection to imperilling either her person or her millinery quite overmastered her curiosity, he heard Aunt Agatha's voice ringing out from the dusty confusion with anything but complimentary exhortations to her recruits, who were pausing irresolute at the entrance.

"Don't you go in, Miss Agatha—now, don't you," shouted one of the men. "That ain't safe, really."

"You cowardly loons," said my aunt, "would you let the woman die without help?"

"Don't go, Frank," said Miss Tipple. "You hear it is not safe, and you'll get your coat all over dust."

Mr. Jordan firmly, but not urgently, removed her grasp.

"Where there is danger and distress, there is the parson's place," said he, and in another moment he had followed Aunt Agatha, the men timidly imitating his example, and leaving Miss Tipple alone with little Job Chalk, of whom she did not condescend to take any notice.

The rickety building was a mere heap

of ruins. Some village wiseacre had superimposed on a lath and plaster basement a brick upper storey. This angle of the building had fallen in, and in its fall had dragged with it older portions of the house, so that now timbers were sloping in all directions, and what had not actually fallen seemed tottering to its fall. Amid this dangerous débris Aunt Agatha was making her way, when some of the boldest of those who were following her started back with a shout of alarm. A thin blue smoke, followed by hungry, vicious-looking tongues of flame, was apparent, and even Mr. Jordan and Aunt Agatha, who were now side by side, paused for an instant on seeing these evidences of peril. The hesitation, which was but momentary, did not survive the stifled sound of moaning that broke upon the ear.

But Aunt Agatha was no longer allowed to take the command. The soft cooing voice to which she had at times listened with something akin to contempt could assume the tone of command, and, strong as she was, and "masterful" as all the village folks said, Aunt Agatha was woman in her heart, leaning with gladness and submission on a stronger will than her own.

"You will wait here," said Mr. Jordan, "for a few moments. I will call you if you can be of help;" and then, with keen rapid glance sweeping those who were present, he singled out a robust young man, and in a voice that might have led soldiers on to battle, said: "Howard, you come with me."

The young fellow obeyed as a matter of course, and then ensued a short pause of painful suspense. Presently Howard reappeared with a flushed and frightened expression, but evidently putting a strong restraint upon himself.

"Stallybrass and Ward, you be to come with me. Miss Agatha, you be to wait."

But Bob Howard's voice had not the magic of Mr. Jordan's, and she would wait no longer. Pushing her way through the ruins and the smoke with those that had been summoned into what had been Miss Payne's little parlour, she pressed her lips tighter together, and the colour fled her face as she saw the motionless form of her old enemy stretched on a couch there, and standing by the side of it the rector, blood streaming from a wound on his head, his coat torn, and one arm hanging listless by his side. Some falling bricks and timber had struck him and had disabled the arm, and

lest his appearance should excite alarm he had sent Bob Howard with the message for help and a strict injunction to say nothing beyond what he had been told.

In a few seconds Miss Payne, more frightened than hurt, was moved beyond the reach of peril, and was conveyed to Aunt Agatha's cottage, accompanied by the wounded rector. Aunt Agatha's foresight had already summoned good Doctor Holmes to the place, and hurrying as fast as his lame foot would permit, he reached the cottage almost at the same time as the cavalcade. Miss Tipple, indignant that her cousin should have deserted her for "that woman," had not awaited the issue of the investigations.

Dr. Holmes pronounced Miss Payne to have sustained a very severe shock from fright, but to be free from bodily damage. The rector's arm was broken, but the wound on the head was only skin deep, and not much more serious than the torn coat.

From that time for many months Aunt Agatha's house became Miss Payne's home, and her hostess tended her with all the solicitude of a daughter. A great poet has told us that "the learned eye is still the loving one," and it so happened that in this unwearied tendance and ministration Aunt Agatha discovered not a few unsuspected virtues in the fat, wheezy, puffy old soul, and something like genuine attachment sprung up between them.

A very constant attendant was the Rev. Frank Jordan. Even when his arm was still very painful, and he might well have been excused had he abstained from visiting a parishioner who was in no imminent danger, his solicitude about Miss Payne was remarkable. In spite of the severity of winter snows and frosts, his arm secured by splints and bandages, he would come, and sit for a whole ten minutes with Miss Payne, and for whole hours talking with Aunt Agatha—probably about the patient's symptoms.

But the snows melted on the high hills, and the brooks, swollen with their muddy tribute, chattered noisily down the slopes, and snowdrops and crocuses, daffodils and violets, bloomed again, and in due course the breath of the blush-roses in the garden was wafted into the cottage.

And then people in the village said, and laughed at each other as they said it, that Miss Tipple was going to give up Barham House and to leave Hilderstock. She had indiscreetly spoken to some bosom friends

of her approaching marriage with the rector, and before the chrysanthemums had opened out their ragged beauties to the next autumn sun it became known that Mr. Jordan's consent had never been asked for this arrangement, and that the parson had, with good success, asked that "remarkably disagreeable woman" to be his bride.

Miss Tipple reflected, however, with some complacency that the living was a very poor one, and that Miss Gayfer's fortune, for all her ridiculous pride, was barely enough for her to live on in decency. But even in this she fell into her besetting sin of premature talk: for when poor old Miss Payne died a year or so later, it was found that she had left the whole of her not inconsiderable fortune to Frank Jordan, in recognition of the great kindnesses and services that she had received from her dear friend Agatha, his wife.

and by tallow candles burning in massive candlesticks of silver.

Before the fire, toasting his shapely gaitered legs, sat an elderly gentleman clothed in black, his attire of a pattern that has long years since passed out of vogue. He wore powder in his carefully-arranged hair; a pigtail jerked and strayed about the high collar of his coat. A watch-ribbon, carrying seals and keys, swung from his fob. His white ringed fingers were closed over a gold snuff-box. He was dark-browed, and rather grave of expression; his face was certainly handsome, though a good deal lined and pucker'd, as characterised, moreover, by a certain birdlike aspect; his nose took an aquiline curve, and his eyes owned the keenness and brightness of a hawk's. His broad-brimmed, low-crowned beaver hat rested upon a small spindle-legged table beside him.

A much younger man, slight of figure, fair-complexioned, with fine features, but rather worn and haggard of look, leant against a corner of the mantelshelf. He was clad in a claret-coloured cloth suit, with dark grey stockings; his buttons, knee and shoe buckles were all of cut steel. His unpowdered hair, of an auburn hue, was so disposed as to fall curling upon his forehead and almost to cover his temples. From where he stood he could obtain a view of the large canvas upon the easel. He glanced at it uneasily from time to time, with the air of a dissatisfied critic. The picture was incomplete; it represented an *Entombment*. The young man was, in truth, a painter by profession. The studio was his; he had been listening to certain unfavourable comments upon his handiwork. For his friend, Dr. Dempster, had ventured to be critical.

The younger man moved from the fireplace to the easel, carrying the lamp with him; he held it up so that the light might fall fully upon his canvas; and then stood still for some moments, frowningly considering it.

"You are perhaps right, doctor," he said at length, slowly and with a sigh.

"I know I am right, Paul Reinhardt," observed the elder man confidently. "It's my business to be right. I have not studied and practised medicine and surgery all these long years to be wrong at last. For, look you, this is not simply a fine-art question, or I would hold my tongue. It is rather a physical question; it concerns natural philosophy, science, anatomy, physiology,

FROM THE GRAVE.

BY DUTTON COOK.

I.

AT the back of a large old-fashioned red-brick house in the Soho district, a spacious studio, lit by a glazed dome, had been built over what had been once probably a walled-in London garden. A strong door, fastened by means of a heavy lock and bolt, and half hidden by a dark-hued curtain of embossed velvet, opened from the studio on to a narrow back street or mews. The whitewashed walls were hung with unframed paintings, sketches, and studies, while here and there appeared plaster casts of heads, hands, feet, and fragments of limbs. There were to be found also, but in no excess, such artistic objects as the painters have always delighted to possess: weapons and armour, screens and draperies, specimens of carved oak, mediæval furniture and accessories, with the indispensable dais or throne, for the due exhibition of sitters and models. The floor was only in part carpeted. A large canvas rested upon a substantial straddling oaken easel. A red fire glowed in a capacious grate, emitting much heat, yet leaving certain of the remote corners of the studio bleak enough. It was night: the darkness without wrapped the glazed dome as in a cloak. The room within was but imperfectly lighted by an oil lamp

fact. I am likely to be informed upon those subjects."

The doctor refreshed himself with a noisy pinch of snuff.

"The figures are all drawn conscientiously and laboriously from the life, I do assure you," said the young man addressed as Paul Reinhardt.

"Yes. You have justified your German origin, my friend," the doctor continued. "Your work is grand and true: you have not spared yourself; you are a skilled draughtsman, if your general effect is—what shall I call it?—prosy, stolid. Yes; your figures are all, as you say, drawn conscientiously and laboriously from the life; not a doubt of it. But, my good friend, in this instance"—as he spoke the doctor pointed to the most prominent figure in the painter's composition—"it was not Life that you had need of: it was Death."

"You mean——"

"That is simply a live model lying down in a position you have chosen for him. He is not even asleep. He is alive and awake. Those are not the limbs of a corpse. Those are not a dead man's muscles. That is not a dead man's hand. The blood of life still courses through those veins. If I were to put my finger upon that wrist I should feel a healthy pulse beating."

"But the colour?"

"Well, the colour is livid, unwholesome, ghastly. But does that sufficiently convey the idea of your picture, or does it merely demonstrate that you are not a colourist, my friend? It strikes me that you have tainted all your carnations alike with tones of clay, or of leather, or of nankeen. If one figure is dead, all are dead. If one lives, all live."

"You are perhaps right, doctor," the young man said again after a pause, and with another sigh. "But I think you hardly allow for the unavoidable limitations of art—the difficulties under which an artist labours. I strive hard, I do assure you, to be true to nature, to be sincere in art. It is the same thing almost. But if I fail, I must fail. I can only depict death from a living model, arranged in a particular pose, such as, to my thinking, a dead body might reasonably and naturally be expected to assume."

"I apprehend," said the doctor calmly, tapping his snuff-box, "that if death is to be accurately and faithfully portrayed, it must be from a dead model."

"That is easily said."

"And easily done. Where is the difficulty? My dear Paul, if I have need of what we call 'a subject,' do you think one would not readily be forthcoming? Indeed, if I wanted a hundred subjects I should obtain them forthwith. As a rule, what is wanted is supplied. There is a price to be paid of course. According to my experience, at every step in life there is a price to be paid, of one kind or of another; for it is not invariably payable in money. A man has his price, be he alive or dead; he is worth just so much and no more. In the one case, he can hesitate and haggle about terms; in the other, he can't; he must leave that to his representatives legal or illegal, as the case may be. But one must allow for human infirmities, for the nervous system, epigastric condition, the state of the digestion, and so on—not to speak of moral scruples, for they are always possible, however irrational their character. It may be that you are so accustomed to paint only from the quick, you would object to paint from the dead; that what is called your nature—by which term I understand the stomach simply to be signified—would revolt at such a proceeding."

"If I do not think so," said the painter. "If I know myself——"

"So few of us know ourselves," the doctor interrupted.

"If I know myself," repeated the young man, putting from him the remark with a waving movement of his hand, "I should not hesitate to ply my brushes even in the presence of the dead. Surely my hand would not fail me; my eyes would not lose their power of observing; my senses, my reason would not abandon me? I have no moral scruples on the subject."

"I am glad of that. What we call moral scruples are often only silly prejudices in masquerade."

"I am not timid, although I desire to make no foolish vaunt of my courage."

"No, you are not timid, my friend. But you own a certain element of imaginativeness. Sometimes it seems to me that the very brave are merely the very stupid. They confront danger boldly because they fail to understand it. They have no mind's eye. They only see what is before them; and they see without fully comprehending. Men are often frightened, not simply by facts, but by the strange thoughts, dreams, and inventions they weave round facts, magnifying and mystifying them. After all, what is a dead body?"

To me it is nothing. We members of the healing art are so often brought face to face with death," he said with a grim smile. "We are for ever walking, as it were, over a battle-field. The bodies of those who have fallen in the great battle of life encompass us upon every side. If we doctors have not absolutely slain them with our own hands, we have not saved them. Should we fear the dead? Should we flinch and shiver and tremble when we pass them by or step over them? Surely not. They are powerless for good or for evil, poor things. Yet they have their uses. Science has need of them. Why should they not serve Art likewise?"

"I know no reason why they should not," answered the painter.

"To me the dead are 'subjects,' as I said. We force Death to betray to us certain of the secrets of Life. We cut our way, literally, to the mysteries of nature. For us the dead speak, and to good and salutary purpose. Who is wronged? Well, possibly—I say possibly—the grave is desecrated. Is that anything more than a manner of speaking—a set phrase, without any particular significance? If bodies are wanted they must come from somewhere. If they come from the church-yard, what is that to me? I do not feel bound to make enquiries that might or might not be inconvenient. There are traders in 'subjects' as there are traders in other wares. Do you ask in every shop you enter whence came the shopkeeper's goods? The 'subjects' are brought from the hospital, from the jail, from the poorhouse, from the grave. I care not, I know not, which. Does it matter to me, to you, to anybody? To the dead it can matter not at all. For my part, when life has left this old trunk of mine, I place it at the disposal of Science. Surgery may do its best or its worst with it. I shall reck not. Living I have served my fellow-men; I shall be happy if it may be possible for me to serve them in death and afterwards."

The doctor looked at his watch.

"Near midnight," he said. "I did not think it was so late. I grow old and garrulous, and upon some topics, when I once begin, I cannot stop myself. But one word more. Is it to be Aye or No?"

"You mean——?"

"Say Aye, and by this time to-morrow, or let me say rather in the course of to-morrow night, the model you and your picture have need of shall be brought into your studio, shall be lodged before

your easel. All shall be done secretly and silently. I will charge myself with the accomplishment of the project. It shall be carried out completely without your stirring. You need not appear, you need speak no word; but I pledge myself that you shall have your model. All I ask is that you will be at once bold and prudent and calm, and that you will leave that door unlocked"—he pointed to the door which led from the studio into the mews—"or that you will be in readiness to open it upon the instant when you hear a tap upon it without. You understand? I see you do. Now, is it to be Aye or No?"

"It is to be Aye," said the painter firmly.

"So be it, then. Good-night, Paul Reinhardt."

"Good-night, Doctor Dempster."

The doctor went his way. The painter sat musing before the fire. He outstretched his hands—they had turned very cold—and warmed them over the red-hot embers. Presently he took up the lamp to inspect anew his large incomplete picture of the Entombment. Passing a small looking-glass fixed against the wall he glanced for a moment at the reflection of himself. He started: he had never before known himself to look so extremely wan and pallid.

II.

TWENTY-FOUR hours had passed.

Paul Reinhardt was alone in his studio. His lamp was lighted, and the fire glowed again in his grate. He moved about uneasily; now pausing before his picture, and now examining and re-examining the lock and flints of a horse-pistol that rested upon the mantelshelf. He looked not so much alarmed as anxious and suspicious. He knew that something strange was about to happen. He was less certain as to how he should meet and endure the coming event; its shadow was already upon him. Frequently he consulted his watch. He opened the door leading to the narrow street at the back of the house and looked out, this way and that. It was very dark. He held his breath that he might listen the better. All was very still. Stay! Surely he heard something. Footsteps? No. A voice? Yes. But it was only the echo of the watchman's cry, as, in a distant street, he announced the hour of the night and the state of the weather.

It was very cold; a bitter wind blew down the narrow street. Paul Reinhardt

with a shiver returned to his hearth, and stood there with one foot upon the fender, leaning against the mantelshelf in his old attitude, his cut-steel buckles sparkling in the firelight.

"Can any accident have occurred?" he asked himself. "Has there been any mistake? Can the old doctor have failed to carry out his plan?"

He was trembling with nervous anxiety.

But now, he could not be deceived. The sounds, first of wheels, then of footsteps, of low-toned speech, were plainly audible. The door—it had been left unfastened—was pushed open slowly. Then appeared a man with his hat slouched over his face, and wearing a long, heavy, many-caped coat; a large coloured handkerchief was wound loosely round his neck. For a moment he stood still, glancing round the studio, as though taking note of its contents. His eyes met Paul Reinhardt's.

The man raised a thick grimy forefinger, by way of signal. A thick-set, swarthy man, dark-eyed, black-browed, blue-chinned, coarse-featured.

"By the doctor's order," he said in a hoarse whisper, "a male subject—paid for. Is that right?"

Paul Reinhardt nodded.

The man withdrew for a moment; a low whistle was heard. Presently he reappeared with a companion assisting him. They carried a long and heavy burthen wrapped in a sheet of rough and ragged sackcloth of a dark hue. They stood for a moment in doubt. Paul pointed to the dais. They rudely and rather noisily deposited, or rather flung down, there the thing they had been carrying.

"You will drink?" asked Paul. Yes; they would drink: brandy, gin, usquebaugh, anything. They were not particular.

Thereupon he took a bottle and glasses from a cabinet in a corner of the studio and gave them brandy. They emptied their glasses very promptly and prepared to go.

"Stay," said Paul; "one word more. There has been no foul play?"

"There has been no foul play, as far as I know," calmly answered the man who had first entered the studio. "The subject died a natural death—at least I suppose he did."

"In a workhouse?"

"No—the case was urgent—we could hear of no workhouse subject suitable. Our order was very strict. But, there

was a funeral this morning at St. Pancridge's. Our dread was lest there should be any one watching the grave. We get shot at sometimes—no one wants to be shot at if he can help it. But there were no watchers this time, and the dark night favoured us. We managed the business very comfortably."

"Let me fill your glasses again."

They drank more and more brandy. He gave them money; they departed; the painter closing, locking and bolting the door behind them. He listened; he could hear their footsteps, the grinding of wheels, the tramp of a horse's hoofs. They had gone. Paul Reinhardt was left alone with the dead body. It was with an effort he induced himself to approach it.

His face was very pallid, his fingers trembled curiously as he lightly raised the sackcloth sheet and tossed it on one side, and gazed at the figure it had wrapped and concealed.

"A man of my own age," mused the painter, "and about my height. Well-formed, symmetrical, muscular, with short curling dark hair. He must have been handsome, I think. Surely he has not long been dead. How pale he is—how very pale. Yet," he added, as he caught sight of his reflection in the glass, "not paler than I am, I think; no one could well be paler than that. How cold and dark and stiff are his hands. How cold he is here about his heart. Yet, I should have thought death would have been colder. What has this man's life been? What brought him to the grave whence he has been but now so rudely torn? He had not lived so very many years in the world. Was his life happiness to him? Did he love much? Was he loved? Was he loath to die? Who can tell? His lips are closed for ever. The story of his life—if it had a story—is a secret that will never be told. Do I know the man? No. A face like that, it seems to me, that I may have seen somewhere, at some time. But not that face. No, I do not know the man."

The painter brought his lamp nearer to his large picture of the Entombment, then glanced from the design to his dead model. With a scrap of white chalk he made certain marks, corrections, or memoranda upon the canvas.

"It is curious," he noted, "how nearly the body has fallen into the lines of the figure in the picture. Chance brought me in the neighbourhood of the truth then.

Yet the doctor was right. There is a want of accuracy here. I have failed to give or to suggest the effect of death. The painting is not so dead as the model. If the doctor were to place his finger upon that wrist he would feel no pulse beating." He glanced again from the model to the picture and back again. Suddenly he stopped. "Strange," he said, "what is that spot upon the wrist? A scar? A birth-mark?" He bent down to examine it more particularly.

It was a tattoo mark, a double circle, about half an inch in diameter, enclosing a St. Andrew's cross.

The artist was painfully agitated. "What may this mean?" he demanded huskily, his heart throbbing noisily. He bared his own wrist; it was marked in a corresponding manner, with a like double circle enclosing a St. Andrew's cross!

"Years ago, when I was a boy at Utrecht, that figure was tattooed upon my wrist by a Scotch schoolfellow and comrade of my own age—one Allan Hay. Can this be indeed Allan Hay? It might be. I cannot be sure. For years we have not met. But what wondrous chance could bring Allan Hay to me, and in this dreadful plight? Am I dreaming? Am I going mad? We were firm fast friends once. Did we ever join in a pledge that if such a thing might be, whichever of us died first should come back from the grave to visit the survivor with tidings of the other world? Some such mad thing we may have madly said in the long-forgotten past. Is this, indeed, Allan Hay? Ah!"

He started back with a scream.

There was a strange movement about the body, a sort of convulsive twitching of the nerves; then there passed over the frame a curious trembling.

Paul Reinhart placed his hand again gently upon the bare breast of his model.

"Great Heaven!" he cried, "the heart beats! He grows warm! The dead man is coming to life again!"

III.

He might have said with Lear, "You do me wrong to take me out of the grave." He seemed to suffer so acutely in returning to animation. It was anguish to him to breathe again.

Vitality was restored gradually and painfully. It was so hard to induce the little leaven of life that had awoke within him to leaven his whole body, to extend to his extremities. A faint action of the

heart was discoverable, and for a long time nothing more than that. Then came a slight and intermittent heaving of the chest. He was bathed in hot water, his limbs were chafed, his lips were moistened with wine. For hours he lay wrapped in blankets before the fire.

He began to murmur inarticulately. The first words he uttered were scarcely intelligible; but he was understood to complain of the cold. He moaned, shivered, and his teeth chattered, the while he was nearly scorched by the heat of the heaped-up and roaring fire.

Dr. Dempster had been sent for, but could not be found. Paul Reinhart had been left almost to his own resources. He thought there might be danger in admitting strangers to his counsels. The man he recognised as his former friend, Allan Hay, had been brought to the studio under such strange conditions. The painter deemed it possible that some criminal charge might be brought against him, that he had rendered himself liable to some penalty of the law. It was desirable, he decided, that secrecy should be maintained as far as possible—for the present at any rate.

"I wish the doctor were here to advise and help me," he said to himself over and over again. "His absence at this time, of all others, is most inconvenient and vexatious."

He had sent again to Dr. Dempster's house in Suffolk Street, Pall Mall. He could only learn, concerning the doctor's movements, that he had been hurriedly summoned to attend a patient in the neighbourhood who was presumably in a state of danger. The doctor had been absent some hours, and was expected back at any moment, but as yet he had not returned.

Paul Reinhart, pondering on the anxieties and difficulties of his position, sat by his studio fire, leaning forward. He was gazing into the burning coals, his hands supporting his head and his elbows resting upon his knees. What was he to do next? What was the story, the mystery of Allan Hay's life? What strange occurrences had brought him to this dreadful pass? It was plain that he had been buried alive! By what cruel chance, or by what infamous design? Would he recover? Was it possible he could survive the terrible trial he had undergone? The painter distressed himself with these questions, asking

them repeatedly, and vainly striving to reply to them.

Suddenly he was conscious of a movement on the part of the man. The poor creature was moving uneasily in his blankets. One hand was raised and waving feebly and helplessly above his head. He seemed struggling to rise. His eyes were wide open, his ashen lips were parted, exposing his clenched teeth. There was upon his face an expression not so much of fear as of almost insane wonder and extreme perplexity.

"Where am I?" he asked in a strangely scared voice.

"Hush! Be calm. You are safe now. You have nothing to fear. Be sure of that."

"Ah, I have seen your face before. I have heard your voice, somewhere, I know. I am sure of it. But where? Let me think, think. No, I am not mad. I have been called mad, but I am not mad. Ah! tell me, is this Utrecht?"

"No, not Utrecht. But you are safe, in friendly hands. No harm can come to you here."

"Stay; you are Paul Reinhardt. I know you now. We were friends once."

"We are friends still, Allan Hay: if you have need of my friendship or of any help that I can render you——"

"Friends! no. We are foes rather. We parted years since. Have you forgotten? We loved the same fair-haired doll: Amanda Milston, with her schoolgirl prettiness, her lily face, her rosy lips, her heaven-blue eyes. She came between us, and we quarrelled, as men always quarrel when a woman comes between them. And we who had vowed to be such friends always! To fall apart for a wretched thing like Amanda Milston! A doll, did I say? A devil rather. We loved her: fools that we were! And we hoped, each of us, for her love in return. Madness! What love had she to give? None! She knew not, she could not know, she could not even dream what love was. A doll? A devil I say again."

"Hush! hush! you over excite yourself."

"I wrong her, you think? No, no; I do her no more than justice. You did not— you do not know her as I know her."

"But all this is past and gone by long since. We have nothing to do with this now. This child—she was but a child—Amanda Milston, is nothing now to you or to me. Why distress yourself with

reviving these old sad memories? Pray be calm. Forget that we ever disagreed and parted. Let us be friends again as in the time long past, Allan Hay. Forget that there ever lived this Amanda Milston."

"Forget her!" he laughed wildly. "It is easy for you to say that. You can afford to be lenient and generous, benign and benevolent. It costs you nothing to forgive and to forget. You did not marry her as I did."

"You married her!"

"What! You did not know?"

"Pray pardon me. I thought I heard that Amanda Milston had dismissed you as she had dismissed me; that she had affected to prefer you only to discomfit you the more. And, but that harsh words had passed between us, no real reason existed why our old schoolboy friendship should not be resumed, and that we might meet again in the old way upon the old terms. But it so chanced that we never did meet again until now, in this strangest of fashions."

"True, she dismissed me as she dismissed you, but it was to beckon me back as she would have beckoned you back had you remained in sight and within range of her power to allure and illude. Prudently you received her sentence and manfully departed. You did not know how easily she could reverse her own judgments, unsay to-day the things she had said yesterday, in order, perhaps, to say them over again to-morrow. Fool that I was! I lingered, to find myself at her feet again, her chained slave, her abject spaniel, fawning and crouching, only to be teased and buffeted, the victim of her every idle caprice and wanton fancy. I loved her so! I begged for her heart; she gave me—a stone. It was all she had to give. She promised to become my wife—withdrew her promise—renewed it again. We parted for ever; to meet again half an hour afterwards. No wonder you heard that all was over between us! We were for ever agreeing that we could never be anything to each other. At length it really seemed that we had finally separated. For weeks I did not see her or hear from her. Suddenly a wild impulsive letter reached me. She implored my return. I went. A new whim had taken possession of her, or she wished to wound some other lover. I found her in a yielding mood. She fled with me to Scotland and became my wife. What a triumph! Amanda Milston my wife—my evil genius—my

sworn tormentor! The happiness of my life was wrecked upon her flint of a heart. Give me wine; let me wash away the taste of these thoughts."

His voice grew weaker; he had overtaxed his strength; he was still suffering from the perils he had undergone; he had not escaped whole and unscathed from the grave. But a nervous excitement possessed him; he tossed to and fro uneasily among his blankets before the fire. He talked incessantly; he could not be calmed or silenced. Almost it seemed as though his wits were disordered, his mind diseased. He told of the discord, the strife, the misery of his married life; of his wife's heartlessness, cruelty, and treachery.

"I had not, as you had," he said, "an art to turn to as an anodyne. I could not, as you could, seek in professional life forgetfulness of the miseries of my home. I was, as you may remember, a law student. I was duly called to the Scottish bar; but I had not the strength, the alertness of mind, the firmness of nerve necessary to success as an advocate. I had but little practice. Amanda had thus a new reason for despising me. Our means were but small. The son of a Scottish laird of small fortune, unable to proceed with my profession, I found myself often poor enough. Even those who love find poverty hard to bear. Think how Amanda found it! She could not love, but she could hate, as I had soon to learn. She despised me; she hated me; she wished me dead. But I can say no more now. I grow faint and very, very weary. By-and-by I will tell you more."

He fell back, and in a moment was soundly asleep: not to waken for some hours. Paul sat beside the sleeper, contemplating him, and considering his strange story.

Suddenly he stirred, shook himself, and rose.

"I must go out. Fear not; I will come back. I am strong enough now. Lend me clothes and money—a very little will do. Enough to pay for a hackney-coach."

It was in vain that Paul opposed his going forth.

"You forget," he said. "I have a wife at home who thinks herself a widow. I must undeceive her. She has to learn that I am still alive."

Paul offered to accompany him. It was not prudent for him to go alone.

"What!" cried Allan Hay with a wild laugh, "you would see your old love

again? You are curious as to how Amanda looks after all these years? Another time, my friend—another time will do for that."

And, weak and ailing, wild of look and with trembling limbs, he went forth alone.

IV.

It was late at night when Dr. Dempster re-entered Paul Reinhardt's studio.

"You sent for me," said the doctor, "but I could not come before. I have been closely engaged all day long. I have not had an hour to call my own. Are you ill? Has anything happened? You wear a strangely troubled look; your face is very pale and worn. How your hand burns! And what a pulse! What's the matter? Have you seen a ghost? Have you been allowing your imagination to run riot and scared yourself into a fit? Have you been suffering from indigestion, and are you just wakened from a nightmare?"

"Not that exactly," answered Paul, with some hesitation.

He felt some difficulty in relating to the doctor what had happened, noting his unsympathetic mood.

"Has Joel kept his word?" The doctor glanced round the studio as though looking for something. "But I see he has not."

"Who is Joel?"

"The question shows that he has failed me. Joel deals in 'subjects.' He received particular instructions from me. I suppose some difficulty occurred. But I never knew Joel to fail before, he is usually very businesslike and punctual and trustworthy in his dealings. Let me sit down by the fire; I feel quite worn out. I have seldom gone through a more trying and fatiguing day. And if you could give me a glass of punch, I'd drink it and be obliged to you."

"It is my turn to ask what has happened?" said the painter, as he attended to the doctor's needs.

"You must know," Dr. Dempster began presently, "that I was hurriedly sent for the morning after I left you, to attend a lady who had been seized with violent fever and delirium. She was a young woman of considerable beauty, a widow. She had lost her husband very recently, I was told, and it was supposed that the shock had deranged her intellects. At the same time I gathered—though it mattered little enough, all things considered—that she and her departed husband had not lived happily together—had, indeed, lived most unhappily together. He had been a

Scottish advocate, I learnt, but had no practice. For some time they had been living in lodgings near Charing Cross. I saw her for the first time. I was called in to advise with her regular medical attendant, a man of whom I knew nothing, and whom, I may say at once, I did not like. His manner struck me as insolent and offensive. He had simply sent for me to confirm his opinion, and to second his proposals as to the treatment of the patient. Now I am in the habit of forming opinions for myself, and of adopting my own modes of medical treatment.

"It so happens," the doctor continued, after a pause, "that I have made much study of cerebral derangement. That the lady was suffering from a serious mental disorder I could not doubt. She had made some attempt at self-destruction. She had accused herself of a very dreadful crime—nothing less than the murder of her husband. She believed detection to be imminent. She had persuaded herself that she was being watched, and that the officers of justice were already in quest of her; that a shameful death upon the scaffold was assuredly in store for her. I need not tell you that propensity to suicide, unreasonable fears, forebodings, and self-accusations are plain indications of a diseased mind. The patient was in a state of acute mental distress; she was talking wildly, incoherently, deliriously; she was what people call raving. But I mustn't weary you with a long story, or set forth the process by which I arrived at a certain important conclusion. I was influenced, however, less by what the woman said, though she said many strange things, than by the man's manner. He evidently desired to silence her at all costs, by the most brutal means if no others were available. In fine, I convinced myself that a crime had really been committed; that the woman's husband had been murdered in the most shameful manner, and that the man I found with her was her accomplice and, as I suspect, her lover. In plain words, the husband had been heavily drugged with opium, then treated as dead, and hurriedly buried—alive."

"The woman's name is Amanda Hay," cried Paul. "She is the wife of Allan Hay, advocate."

"How did you know that? I was careful not to mention any names."

Paul then related how Allan Hay had returned to life from the grave, describing the incidents that preceded his recovery.

"All this is very strange," mused the doctor. "You are sure you have not been dreaming, Paul? Then, after all, Joel was as good as his word."

"But Amanda—is her state hopeless?"

"She cannot recover, as I judge. She is shattered, mind and body, by her fears and her remorse. Could anyone wish her to live?"

"She was very beautiful once."

"She is beautiful still, for that matter."

"And I loved her with my whole heart."

"Of course that alters the case," said the doctor.

V.

A SUDDEN movement in the half-lighted studio startled the two men. A gaunt, weird, ghostly figure emerged from the darkness and stood before them. It was Allan Hay.

"I have seen her. She lives," he said in hollow tones, feebly swaying to and fro the while. "But she did not know me. She is stark mad. If she had known me I should have killed her. I looked into her eyes. I found no recognition, no speculation there. It was as though she had never seen me. So I spared her. It was best, I think."

He laughed wildly, tossing up his arms and staggering about the room.

"Who is this?" whispered Dr. Dempster.

"Allan Hay."

"The husband. Ah, I understand."

Rising from his chair, the doctor with his keen hawk's eye watched curiously the man returned from the grave.

"But he is dead!" cried Allan Hay, laughing and staggering anew.

But for Paul's aid, indeed, he would have fallen.

"Who is dead?" asked Paul, with both arms supporting him.

"Her lover. The man who helped her to poison me. He loved her and he hated me. She was to become his wife after my death. I heard them whispering their plans together. He will never whisper again. I did not quit my hold until I knew that he was dead. Look here!" He held out his hands; they were torn and bleeding. "See how he scratched and bit, like a wild cat! But I strangled him. He will bite and scratch no more. All is over now."

Uttering a strange cry, a sob, a gasp, a groan—it was hard to say which—the poor wretch slipped through Paul's arms on

to the dais beside the picture of the Entombment.

Dr. Dempster sprang towards him. In a moment the doctor's fingers were upon his pulse.

"He is dying," said the doctor with a significant glance at Paul.

"Can nothing be done?"

"Nothing." There was a dreadful stillness for some minutes.

"He is dead," said the doctor. He released the wrist he had been holding between his right forefinger and thumb, and lightly let the dead man's hand fall beside him. "You can renew your studies from the dead model."

The painter shook his head mournfully.

"Never more," he said. "Allan Hay was dear to me once."

Paul buried his face in his hands.

"Come, come, my friend; this must not be. There is something to be thought about. After all, the living are rather to be considered than the dead. What are we to do? I will tell you. We must turn our backs upon all this. We must treat it all as though it had never been, or as though it had been the bad dream I once judged it to be."

He threw over the body some ragged sackcloth he found upon the dais.

"We must forget the whole business."

"Never," said Paul Reinhardt.

"This I will do, at any rate," said the doctor. "It will be the best course to pursue for all concerned. I will send to Joel straightway and bid him carry back to St. Pancras's Churchyard the body he stole from it some few hours since. That act of restitution is in our power at any rate. For the rest—well, I think we will leave the rest to chance, and hold our tongues meanwhile."

The doctor regaled himself with repeated pinches of snuff as he literally turned his back upon the dead body of Allan Hay.

PLAIN JOHN SIMPSON.

BY R. E. FRANCILLON.

I.

WITH a light heart I threw myself into the very earliest train that left Macon for Geneva, and realised that at last I was alone—and free! I had been eccentric enough to take a first-class ticket, for silence and solitude, and the freedom that they mean, had become things of vital necessity. In freedom, solitude, and

silence I lighted my cigar, and gazed out of window, in a mood of luxurious idleness, upon the flying vineyards, glittering with last night's rain and with the early morning sun. And, as I gazed, thus I mused:

"Yes, I have done the trick at last, this time! It was a happy thought, that, to tell the infernal old villain, last night in the smoking-room, that I should start for Paris by the mid-day train. He thinks I'm safe in bed, and I shall be able to fancy him in an hour from now coming down to breakfast, smirking and smiling, and rubbing his hands, and looking round for me, like a spider for a fly, only to find that 'fly' has been the very word! I am free—free—free!"

Yes, for ages, as the period of my torture seemed, I had been suffering from the intolerable persecutions of a Bore. I was sketching one morning on the bank of the Rance, long ago, when I became conscious that my canvas was being overlooked by a little, fat, bald-headed being, who appeared to be beaming at my work with a smile of perfectly imbecile ecstasy.

"Equal to Titiens, that!" said he, rubbing his hands in a way with which I was doomed to become acquainted only too well. "You're a genius, that's what you are, or my name isn't Simpson. And when I say a thing, that's the thing I mean. I must tell you in confidence, you know, that I'm a most extraordinarily candid man. Give me the man that wears his heart on his sleeve, you know, for daws to peck at, as they say in the play. If I had the pleasure of your acquaintance, I'd say more. But if anybody told me the painter of that picture isn't a greater genius than Caractacus, I'd—I'd—tell him—I'd tell him, sir, that I didn't agree with him; and I'm a candid man. I always speak my mind whatever the consequences may be. I mayn't know much about art myself, but I know when I like a thing, and I'm never afraid to say so; no, not to the very face of the man who did it—there! I hope you're not one of those that are offended with candour? For if you are, I can tell you you'll never get anything else from John Simpson. And I tell you, sir, that you are a genius, and if you say you're not, then I won't give a fig for your opinion—there! I'm plain John Simpson, and I always speak my mind."

I'm afraid—sadly afraid—that a first dose of praise, though laid on inches thick by a man who thinks that Caractacus and Titiens were portrait-painters, and

misquotes Shakespeare, has a certain relish for us all.

My Bessy thought me a genius, I know, but Mr. Simpson was the first stranger, in or out of print, who had ever told me so. After all, the appreciation of genius does not require learning—or where would genius be? And John Simpson might be a great art-patron for aught I could tell, while I was struggling and poor, and in love besides.

Well for me if my acquaintance with "Plain John Simpson," as he delighted to call himself, and with perfect truth so far as face and figure were concerned, had ended then and there! He seemed to be pretty well off, to judge from his comfortable way of going on, but to have no travelling companions; and he chose to hook himself on to me, who am not particularly fond of casual company. He talked a great deal, and the one subject of his conversation was my transcendent merits and his extraordinary candour. It was not only when I painted that I was superior to Caractacus and Titiens. And the very vainest of mortals likes sometimes to do something without being told that he is superior to somebody.

He happened once, in the hotel where we were both staying, to catch me strumming on the piano; he sat down in a corner in an attitude of rapture, and brought my idle performance to an end by proclaiming defiantly that candour obliged him to recognise me as a regular Maestoso, adding that music hath charms, and that a thing of beauty is a joy for ever.

From that moment I, as politely as I could, tried to put my elbow between myself and his advances, and to turn silent and cold. But cold water has no more effect upon a duck's back than cold manners appeared to have upon plain John Simpson. The more he got of it, the warmer he grew.

Circumstances detained me three weeks at Dinan; and during that time I could not say, "Good-morning, Mr. Simpson," without an answer of "Ha, ha, ha! ho, ho, ho! but that was a good one!" And a candid man must have his laugh out at a good joke, whatever the consequences may be! Send it to *Punch*, sir, send it to *Punch*; and if they don't put it in—why, I'll say they ought to; and plain John Simpson always speaks his mind!"

At first his praise a little tickled me, for it was not unpleasantly new. Then it began to amuse, then to annoy me, then to

disgust; at last to bore. Something of a painter I believed myself to be, but when I was treated as painter, musician, critic, poet, philosopher, and wit all in one—well, all that even I myself could not contrive to swallow. I began at last to look forward with hope to the day when I should be asked for the temporary loan of that inevitable half-crown which, in the language of the Arabian Nights, is "the terminator of delights and separator of companions."

Alas! though Mr. Simpson never suggested that he should become the purchaser of one of the sketches he so much admired, it was very soon plain to be seen that I was more likely to have occasion for his half-crowns than he for mine. No suspicion of a motive for his universal admiration for me could cross my mind when I saw the ready punctuality with which he paid for everything, and how eager he was to stand whatever we ate, drank, or smoked in company.

Tiresome as he was, I could not accuse him of being niggardly; and I not seldom had to use my better knowledge of the coinage and language of the country to keep in check his tendency to pay double for everything. He seemed to be overflowing with generosity and good-nature towards all the world, so that I was now and then almost tempted to like him if he had only been a little more chary of his expressions of devoted friendship and boundless admiration.

Often, towards the latter part of my stay at Dinan, I tried to escape from his society. But it was never of the least use to try. By some fiendish instinct or other he would trace me out within an hour, and then I was doomed to his clutches for the remainder of the day.

But at last I said "Good-bye," and I thought I saw tears in his eyes. There were certainly none in my own.

I continued my wanderings to Rome, and thence to the Nile. And it was at the foot of the Great Pyramid that I heard these words:

"Oh, what a wonderful thing is sympathy! Here we are again!"

And so we were. By some strange accident, plain John Simpson had been on his way to Egypt too. And he clasped my hand as if I were glad to see him. From that hour the great land of mysteries, crocodiles, and excursionists had lost its charm. Plain John Simpson pervaded it all.

Need I continue this portion of my tale? From that hour I knew that I had become the prey of plain John Simpson no less than if he had been a fiend expressly sent to plague me. Wherever chance or purpose led me, there, by some unaccountable coincidence, he also turned up, everywhere the same, imperturbable in temper, overflowing with unctuous amiability, eternally praising, glorifying his own candour, beaming, and rubbing his hands. It was hopeless to think of quarrelling with a man who could neither give a snub nor feel one. But was this to go on until one of us died?

And now I had been tumbling over him again at Macon, when fondly believing him to be on his way down the Rhine. But I had freed myself from my incubus at last; that day would carry us in different directions. I was free. And it should be my own fault if I ever fell into his clutches again.

II.

I FORGET the name of the station at which, to drink a glass of wine, I first left the train. It does not signify. I was not more than a couple of minutes away from my carriage; and yet, no sooner had the train started than I heard from the opposite corner:

"What a wonderful thing sympathy is, to be sure! Why, if here we aren't again! And I thought—but, well, we're a regular Demon and Python, as we used to say at school. You are such a jolly fellow, you know! None of the long-hair, turn-over collar nonsense about you. Why, I feel as if I might have been a genius myself, seeing you take things so easy. P'raps I should have been if I'd been educated to that line. But if I haven't got the genius I must do myself the justice to confess I know what I like, speaking as a candid man. Mock modesty's just cant and humbug, sir! I know what I'm not, but I know what I am. I'm not a Hamlet nor an Othello; but I'm plain John Simpson, and that's more than Hamlet could say. Now, some people might wonder to see how first-rate we chum together, you and me. The fact is, you're a genius, and I'm a man that says to genius, when he sees it, 'There you are!' And so we can't drop apart, even if we tried. Why, I do verily believe that if you were at the North Pole and me at the South, the law of what d'ye call it, you know, would bring

us together again in half an hour. I do believe that nature meant me and you to be born in Siam—twins, you know. I was thinking of some beautiful lines upon that very subject as I came along in another part of the train, for, would you believe it, sir, I didn't know you were in this carriage till I saw you get out just now, and then I changed in the twinkling of an eye, as they say. It was some lines I once came across in a newspaper which you mayn't have happened to see:

Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
And waste its sweetness on the desert air!

There—those lines are just as if they were written on purpose about you and me. You're the flower, you see, born to blush unseen, if it wasn't for the desert, you know—that's me—coming in, and—No; that isn't quite how I made it out in the other carriage; but I know I did make it come all right, somehow; and that's the great thing. I daresay I shall remember presently. I'll be sure and tell you when I do. I am so glad to have met you again, my dear, dear sir! Sympathy's a wonderful thing—almost as wonderful as steam! Take one of these cigars. They didn't cost more than eight pounds a hundred; but they're fairish, all the same. And while we're going on, I'll tell you the whole story of how I came to be bald. I don't think you ever heard it before?"

I had heard just twenty-nine times before. How was a life-long eternity of chatter like this to be endured, however strongly larded with personal flattery it might be? And if it were true that the distance of the poles was not to keep us asunder—I inwardly groaned. Something must be done.

"I must own," said I, "that I didn't expect to have the—the pleasure—of meeting you again so soon. I thought you were bound for Paris, while I—"

"For Paris? Of course I am."

A ray of hope flashed through me. "Are you aware," I asked, "that this train is not for Paris, but Geneva?"

"Not for Paris—for Geneva? Bless my soul! I must have got hold of the wrong page of Bradshaw. I could have sworn that this was the train for Paris, as sure as my name's John Simpson. I remember that I had some difficulty with the young woman at the booking-office—either I couldn't understand her, or she couldn't understand me. I'm not a walking Babel, like you are, my dear sir. I declare such a thing

never happened to me in my life before. But it shows how we ought to be taught French when we're young. Now I can understand your French; but I'm hanged if I can ever quite make out a Frenchman's; and as for a Frenchwoman's, it's no more like what I used to be taught at school than a cabbage is like a grasshopper, so to say. It's my belief those French fellows don't know any sort of civilised tongue—not even their own. But—by Jingo!—where's my luggage gone?"

"But you needn't go all the way to Geneva," said I, eagerly. "Look here," I went on, opening my Bradshaw, "if you leave the train at Belgarde—it's early yet, you know—here's a train from there that'll bring you to Paris by evening. Of course you've got the ticket for your luggage; and you'll find it all safe and sound, without having lost more than a morning's travel."

"Eh! Oh ah! I see. I never saw a fellow for helping another out of a mess like you! Sir, you're a true friend! And I'm plain John Simpson, and always speak my mind. 'May we never want a friend, nor a bottle to give him.' 'Give me the man that is not passion's slave, and I will wear him—'"

"Out!" suggested I, by way of a new but singularly appropriate, only too painfully suggestive, reading.

"Ha, ha, ha! Ho, ho, ho! 'Wear him out'! Ho, ho, ho! Send it to Punch—capital, by Jingo!—and if they don't put it in, then all I can say is, and I will say it, they don't know a good thing when they see one. 'Wear him out'—just like a hat or a coat, you know—that's as witty a thing as ever I heard! Sir Sydney Smith never said a better, nor that other witty fellow—what's-his-name? It's as good as 'Why does a miller wear a white hat?' I forgot the answer just this minute, but the question's capital. But, on second thoughts, I won't go to Paris after all. As you're going to Geneva, I'll go to Geneva too. Pon my soul, I haven't the heart to disappoint you, after you'd been reckoning on my company. After your readiness to help a fellow-creature out of a mess, I mustn't allow you to travel to Geneva all alone. I look upon ingratitude, my dear sir, as unworthy of any candid man. I'll get a new rig-out at Geneva—there's nothing in my baggage that won't keep till we go back to Paris together. You mean to make some stay at Geneva, I presume?"

Confound the fellow! Why had I not

said I was going to Timbuctoo? At that moment I was anything but "the man who is not passion's slave."

"May be for years—may be for minutes," said I.

"Extraordinary—just my case too! In fact, I never know how long I may be anywhere, and, to speak candidly, the pleasure we take in one another's company will weigh with me more than anything. We'll have a regular good time in Geneva, my dear sir, as the Yankees say. I'm travelling for improvement—to make up for the educational deficiencies of my parents and guardians—and I must congratulate myself on having met with an intellectual giant, so to say, like you—a regular philosopher and friend. After a talk with you, the last thing before I go to bed I jot down every word I can remember your saying during the day, like old Ben Jonson did to Boswell. I only wish I'd met you in the days when I was young."

This was too terrible!

"I'm afraid, though, you'll hardly care to accompany me to the top of the Matterhorn!" said I. I had no thoughts of going there myself; but it was the best makeshift I could think of on the spur of the moment for Timbuctoo or Hades.

"The Matterhorn? No; I'm afraid that's rather high. But, I can wait at the bottom till you come down again! I assure you, candidly, I shan't mind waiting a bit; you needn't deprive yourself of the Matterhorn on my account, my dear sir."

"But, you see, I've engaged to meet a friend, and—perhaps he mightn't suit you, you know."

"Any friend of yours, my dear sir, must needs be a friend of mine! I shall be proud, proud to make the acquaintance of any friend of yours. We shall make a jovial band of brothers, we three, 'Old King Cole was a jolly old soul,' like you and your friend, and me."

What, in the name of Despair, was I to do?

III.

PLAIN John Simpson did accompany me to Geneva, and, of course, put up at the same hotel.

Of course it was utterly untrue that I was expecting to meet any friend at Geneva. I had invented an imaginary friend in the hopeless hope that my persecutor might not care to intrude upon a company of which he had not been specially invited

to make a third. I had made a terrible blunder. Not only had my rather feeble expedient failed, but I found myself compelled, for my credit's sake, to give my nonexistent friend the name of Paul Jones (the first that occurred to me), and—this with intent—to make him out the most disagreeable, detestable, and contemptible of mankind. I turned him into a sort of Bogey, who might, by the dark hues in which I painted him, scare plain John Simpson away. Alas ! he would not have been scared from my shoulder by a friend with cloven hoofs, horns, and a barbed tail. Over the entire history of the next few days I prefer to draw a veil. It must suffice that my efforts to escape became feebler and fewer, till at last I gave up making any at all. No man can conquer his destiny, and plain John Simpson was mine.

I had, however, at once established communications with England, and the one event of the day in which plain John Simpson's society allowed me to take any interest was my regular visit to the post-office—an interest with which a certain young lady named Bessy Field was intimately concerned. And, alas ! even in this daily excursion my incubus took the most active interest too. He never, so far as I saw, received any letters himself, though he always enquired for them ; but he set up an absorbing anxiety about the movements of my imaginary travelling companion, Paul Jones. When would he come ? I had serious thoughts of receiving the melancholy tidings that Paul Jones had been buried alive in an avalanche, or devoured by wolves. At last, on the fourth day after our arrival in Geneva, I did receive a letter forwarded from the post-office in Paris, in a hand that I knew better than any other in the world.

" Heard from Paul at last ?" asked Mr. Simpson. " When'll he be here ? Why don't you open your letter ? Never mind me. Any letters for plain—I mean for Monseer Jong Sing-song ?" he asked the post-office clerk, putting everything into English except his own name. " Yes ? Well, that's more than I looked for. I wonder who it's from ?"

He opened it, while I was quietly making my way to the door, with my own prize unopened. But hardly had I turned my back when he was after me.

" Well, and how is Paul ? And when'll he be here ?"

I could not open Bessy's letter then and

there, and read it, however slightly, under the beaming eyes of plain John Simpson. I thrust it into my pocket, and, affecting to have read it, said :

" Paul Jones has had a bad sprain. I'm afraid he won't be here for some time."

" Poor fellow—poor fellow ! Dear, dear me ! A sprain's a worse job than a broken leg, you know. Where is he ? Where did he write from to you ?"

" Oh, let me see—from Chamouni."

" Chamouni, eh ? All alone at Chamouni, poor fellow, and sprained ! By Jingo, then, as he can't come to us, you must go to him."

" What ?"

" Of course you must be anxious to be by the bedside of your friend Paul, all alone and sprained in a foreign land. Yes, my dear sir, I understand the delicacy of heart which makes you dislike the thought of leaving me alone. But Candour before all things. I will not be in the way. You shall go to Chamouni."

" Ah, that's a good thought. I will go to Chamouni. I'll start in an hour."

Freedom loomed before me once again. Blessings on Paul Jones for that !

" In an hour ?" asked John Simpson. " Quick work that. The restless energy of genius there—aye, and of philanthropy. Yes, I'll be ready in an hour. You shall not suffer for your kindness to poor Paul. . . . I'll go too !"

I could occasionally effect a retreat into the solitude of my own bedroom, though I never could manage to get away from the hotel without finding John Simpson somewhere in the doorway. Of course I lost no time in carrying Bessy's letter, on the very first opportunity, into the only place in the whole wide world, except her heart, which plain John Simpson allowed me any longer to call my own for half an hour. Thus I read, and, as I read, even plain John Simpson took himself out of mind, and gave me five minutes' holiday.

" I suppose you will get this in Paris, as that is where you told me to write next. But do you know that something very wonderful has happened since last Tuesday—yes, wonderful indeed for me ? You are not the only one who is to go wandering about all over the world, and I daresay not amusing himself so very badly, for all that he may say. Mrs. Archer has asked me to go with her to the Rhine and Switzerland, and I don't know where else ; and, what's more, I'm going, and by the time you get

this we shall have gone. I don't know our exact route, but I shouldn't be very much surprised if, by some accident or other, we happened to be somewhere about Chamouni from the eighteenth to the twenty-third. . . ."

And it was the seventeenth to-day! Why, if I had been in Paris I would have taken the next train, with full faith in that "some accident or other," and here I was, so near as Geneva already! It was not will, but adverse circumstance, that compelled me for the present to live abroad while Bessy remained at home, and if I had not been so compelled, that tyrannical social prejudice which leads young ladies relations to object to painters without customers would have forbidden me to see anything of her worth mentioning. But under the chaperonage of that dearest and best of old ladies, Mrs. Archer, five whole days at Chamouni would be worth living for—things to be gained and drained to the last drop if I had been obliged to come from the antipodes to get them. I would start for Chamouni in an hour—

A tap at the door.

"Here I am! I'm ready to start, and I've paid the bill. Don't mention it, my dear sir! Are you ready? Come along! We'll be by poor Paul's bedside in next to no time, so to say. Won't he be glad to see us! By Jingo, the thought of it gives me quite a glow!"

What was I to do now, with that accursed Bore?

Well, I must go to Chamouni; but, alas, I must go with him. There was no help for it.

I could not even give him the slip on the road which led to Her. And that confounded Paul Jones! Non-existent though he was, he had become almost as great a bore as plain John Simpson. I could not tell the latter how things really were. I am convinced that, had I told him outright that my true object in starting for Chamouni was to meet a young lady, he would have insisted on obliging me by being present at our interview.

All the way to Chamouni plain John Simpson's tongue went on. He waxed enthusiastic over my loyal self-devotion to poor Paul. He tried to recollect some receipt of his mother's for sprains, which, so far as I remember, was concocted of brimstone and treacle, jalap and blue pill. He remarked that Mont Blanc is the monarch of mountains—in fact, the highest in all Europe—and that Lord Byron was a very extraordinary man.

"Don Juan, eh, you know?" he asked, with a knowing wink and an extra rub of the hands. "Some wicked bits there, you know, but uncommonly fine. Just the thing you could write, my dear sir. Most interesting to know he used to drink gin-and-water. It's a drink I'm rather partial to myself, you know—now and then."

Then, for the thirtieth time, he told me the story of how he, John Simpson, became bald; and then— But sleep came to my help, and I heard no more, except, even in my dreams, a refrain of "Plain John Simpson—and I'm a candid man."

Most unaccountably, our enquiries for Paul Jones at Chamouni completely failed. Not only did we fail to hear of a Paul Jones with a sprained ankle, but even of a Paul Jones at all. My persecutor's disappointment was profound.

"Most extraordinary!" said he. "I never heard of such a thing. I'll ask if there's a crier here, and send him round with the bell. Dear, dear, I'm afraid it must be a very bad sprain indeed. But, by Jingo, my dear sir, I'll find your poor friend, poor Paul, dead or alive."

But my enquiries had not failed in one respect. Somebody was at Chamouni, though her name was not Paul Jones; and suddenly a brilliant idea came, like a flash of light, into my mind. Paul Jones should save me, after all!

IV.

It was as well, for the sake of appearances, that my first meeting with Bessy should be accidental; it was absolutely necessary that it should be free from the supervision of John Simpson. I learned (what cannot love learn of such matters?) that Bessy and Mrs. Archer had planned next morning an excursion to the Montanvert.

"Mr. Simpson," said I, "Paul Jones is found!"

"Bless my soul! What?—where?—why?"

"He is in a châlet among the mountains. You've heard of the Mer de Glace? He's there."

Everything is fair in love. On that point, at least, the world is agreed.

"Poor fellow—poor Paul! Come along!"

"Yes, I must not delay. But to reach that châlet demands the wind of an ostrich and the agility of a chimpanzee. You, Mr. Simpson, are neither an ostrich nor a chimpanzee."

"Ha, ha, ha! Ho, ho, ho! I'm not an ostrich! Capital! Send it to— But what's to be done?"

"Only one thing can be done. I will go to the chalet—alone. You, meanwhile, will have quite enough to do in preparing for the reception of Paul Jones—when he comes. You can make that famous liniment, you know."

"I suppose you're right," he said, "because you always are. It's true I'm not an ostrich—ha, ha, ha!—nor a chimpanzee. But—you'll return?"

"Be easy on that score. No—this must be. I will not permit you, Mr. Simpson, to risk the loss of your valuable breath by climbing Heaven knows how far—half-way up the mountain, for aught I know. Good-bye," I said aloud. "For ever," I added aside.

He looked after me a little doubtfully and sadly as I strode off at a pace calculated to show him how impossible he would find it to keep up with me. I breathed again as soon as I was out of sight, and slackened my speed. My plan was (for I knew the tracks pretty well) to head the direction that would be taken by Mrs. Archer and Bessy, then to descend, and meet them by the veriest accident in the world. Hours might pass before I actually met them, but they would have all the charms of anticipation, and passed in active exercise among the mountains which are Nature's crowning glory, while hours in a gaol would now be delightful so long as plain John Simpson did not share my cell.

I had started very early—so early that Bessy must have been still sleeping. I enjoyed my walk immensely, it was a glorious summer day, and all was going well. I reached the foot of the Montanvert and ascended. I knew my way without a guide; every minute brought Bessy nearer, every step left plain John Simpson farther away. Was it cruel to leave him to concoct a liniment for a non-existent sprain? A thousand times, no. A certain measure of vengeance was due to me for all I had suffered at his hands. This should not be another failure like that at Macon. I was free as the hills.

I had even reached the Mer de Glace itself, when the minute came at which I had predetermined to descend, so as to meet Bessy at a point that her mule must needs pass on the ascent of the Montanvert. I had been gone many hours, and had made numberless little detours and explorations of my own. I strolled back

over the icy sea, only taking care of the cracks and chasms that make the Mer de Glace not free from danger for pilots who had less experience of it than I. Presently I looked up from my path and—

Plain John Simpson again? No, a fiend!

"Thank Heaven, thank Heaven!" puffed he. "Safe and sound—hurrah!"

"And what, in the devil's name, brings you here?" I asked, unable any longer to speak to the fellow in a commonly civil tone.

"What? Why? Uh! How plaguy slippery it is, to be sure! They ought to lay down ashes—they ought, indeed. Look what I found in the guide-book as soon as you'd gone off at that swinging pace of yours—look here! 'The Montanvert is ascended on mules, and thus the Sea of Ice may be reached; but the latter part of the excursion is not without some risk, on account of the numerous crevasses in the ice, which are of unfathomable depth.' Unfathomable depth!—Think of that; it gave me the shudders to think of. Aye, indeed! And do you think plain John Simpson could rest quiet when a valuable life like that of a man of genius was in danger of unfathomable depth in the cause of philanthropy? No, sir; no, though I mayn't be an ostrich or a chimpanzee, I'm a candid man. So I just dodged after you, and by extraordinary good luck—power of sympathy, I suppose—I got sight of you as soon as you began to easy all. And then, thought I to myself, what would rare old Ben Jonson have done if he'd seen Boswell or Oliver Cromwell risking his valuable life in unfathomable depth—aye, sir, unfathomable! By Jingo! he'd have been after him like a racer; he wouldn't have waited for mules. You didn't see me, but I had my eye on you, till I lost you; and now I've found you, and I won't leave you till we stand together by the side of poor Paul."

It was too much; how could this be borne? And I had thought—and there was Bessy. At last Nature was too much for one, and out of the fulness of the heart I spoke:

"Mr. Simpson, I have been weak enough to be your victim too long. There are times when courtesy ceases to be a duty. You are a pest, a fool, and a bore. My one object, ever since we met on the banks of the Rance, has been to escape from you. You have embittered and clouded my days, and

poisoned my dreams. Your idiotic jabber, your horrible way of rubbing your hands, your vacant smile, have become odious to me. I hold myself justified in everything I have ever done to rid myself of your society. You were too stupid to take hints, too thick-skinned to feel rebuffs. I invented Paul Jones to get rid of you ; there is no such man. I insisted on your staying alone in Chamouni, solely that I might escape from you and never see you more. Leave me this instant ! Let me never see your face nor hear your odious voice again !

"Bless my soul !" said plain John Simpson. "Talk of candour ! Bless my soul !"

"Do you understand me ?" said I. "There lies the path to Chamouni. Go."

For a moment, I will do him the justice to own that he did look startled and amazed. But it was only for a moment, and :

"Ha, ha, ha ! Ho, ho, ho !" laughed he. "Why you're a born Siddons, a regular young Roscoe ; never saw such acting ; no, not in Drury Lane ! Upon my soul, you were uncommonly near taking me in !"

"Near taking you in ? Do you think I'm playing a comedy ? Do you want to madden me ? Go, or—"

"Bravo, bravo, my dear sir. I shall have something good for my journal to-night, as sure as my name's plain John—"

"You will not go ?"

"Ha, ha, ha !"

"You will drive me to violence—you will understand me when I knock you down !"

"Ho, ho !"

I could not help it. What was left but the unmistakable earnest of a blow ? I struck. But of what should come of that blow, Heaven knows I never dreamed. Of anger I was guilty, but not of that.

My blow sent plain John Simpson sliding backwards. And in one moment, before I could reach out a hand, he was over the edge of a yawning crevasse !

And I was his murderer ! And, nearly at the same instant, I was aware that Bessy, whom I loved, had reached the Sea of Ice from Chamouni.

V.

"By Jingo, that's a bad sprain, that of poor Paul's. Uncommonly bad, to be sure. Why, I feel it just as if it was my own.

Wonderful thing, sympathy ! Just like steam. And, by Jingo, it is my own. I never knew sprains were catching. Well, live and learn. Ah, I remember now."

Surely, never had such an irrepressible being been known, even in the form of a Bore. Not even throwing him into a crevasse among the Alps had been able to get rid of him. Here he was again. Mrs. Archer's guides, with further help from the valley, had, by means of ropes and so forth, extracted plain John Simpson from the crevasse—alive ; though any common man must have been killed. I can only set down his miraculous preservation to his abnormal thickness of skin and skull. He was in bed in the inn, and I, even I, was by his bedside at the moment when his few battered senses found their way back to him. I had come to watch and help, but, now that he had recovered, I dared not remain in the sight of the man whom I had nearly killed.

Mrs. Archer and Bessy, believing the matter to be a simple accident—for my confession had yet to be made—were also in the hotel, and in attendance upon their fellow-countryman. Hearing him speak at last, she entered the room. At the rustle of her dress, he turned towards her, though with obvious pain.

"What—what—little Bessy !" exclaimed he.

"Why—Uncle John !"

My heart sank deep indeed. Bessy's Uncle John, never spoken of by his surname nor without awe ; the rich, eccentric bachelor uncle upon whom her worldly future hung ; the one great man of the family whose consent was needful to all her hopes ; for whose return from his travels I had been waiting as the one possible good fairy who might think fit to crown all mine ! All was over now. It was Uncle John whom I had called pest, fool, bore ; upon whom I had heaped all the insults that my tongue could frame ; whom I had struck in anger ; whom I had done my best, short of direct intention, to kill ! Why had I not allowed him to remain in his belief that I was only acting a comedy ? It was no good asking myself questions. Only one duty was left me—to make a clean breast of it and depart for ever.

"Bessy," said I, as bravely as I could contrive, "appearances are against me, I own. But you will not think me guilty of any design to commit—murder ! when I struck your uncle."

"Eh ? What ? You know my niece

Bessy ? Call her by her name, then—by George and Jingo."

"Yes, Mr. Simpson; you guess the truth. And now—"

"Then all I can say is, I'm as glad as if I'd got back all my head of hair again ; but I'll tell you that story another time. By Jingo, sir ! when I think how you must have suffered after tumbling me, your other self, you know, down into that unthingumable depth, you know, my heart bleeds for you, my dear sir. Yes, candidly, bleeds for you. P'r'aps some people might think you carried your high spirits just a trifle too far. But allowance must be made for the eccentricities of genius by a plain man like me. I'm proud of your genius, sir, though it has given me a tumble. I shall be proud to be your uncle-in-law. No, my dear sir, don't mind me ; it won't inconvenience me at all. Oh dear, dear, to think of all the sorrow and suffering you must have been feeling for me when you thought of plain John Simpson lying at the bottom of an unfathomable depth all dead and cold ! I really must apologise, my dear sir ; I must, indeed ! "

"You apologise to me ?"

"It is my duty as a gentleman," said he. "Unless you consent to take my hand, and say, 'John Simpson, I forgive you,' I shall never be able to forgive myself for having nearly broken your heart by breaking my neck. I did not mean to break my neck, indeed. I really did mean well. Only the next time you want to play a practical joke, don't hit out quite so hard at a fellow, that's all ; though it's the finest actors that get most carried away by their parts, I know. Anybody but myself would have thought that you really did think me a bore—fancy, me ! A capital joke that, to be sure ; ha, ha, ha ! Send that to Punch, my dear sir ; I'll go bail they put that in—me a bore, Bessy ; just think of that ! —ho, ho, ho ! Don't make any more jokes though till I'm better, because laughing hurts my sprain. So my Bessy will marry a genius. For a genius you are, as sure as my name's plain John Simpson—and I'm a candid man."

It was of no use to fight against destiny. Once more I had to give in. Nothing would convince Bessy's uncle that I was not actuated by the highest moral and intellectual motives in narrowly escaping homicide. The man was such an impenetrable—

Fool ? Well, I suppose that is what plain John Simpson would be called by

nine men out of ten. Looking back upon all I have written down, I find him ridiculously free from every well-known mark of superior spirit and intellect—he could not lose his temper ; he enthusiastically revered all whom he thought his betters ; he never spoke an unkind or bitter word of a fellow-creature, or turned up his nose, or sneered. Not one atom of what would-be clever people take to be the salt of life was to be found in his whole composition. He was so loyal that he braved the thought of those unfathomable depths, so that the man he thought his friend might not have to face them alone. He was so ridiculously trustful as to believe even in me. He hungered for sympathy, with so much faith in it as to be unable to dream that love and affection could possibly beget dislike or scorn. At the first hint of a friend's friend being in trouble, he could think of nothing but of flying to his aid. He was unable to realise that his fellow-creatures could be actuated by unworthy motives or could tell lies. He was as innocent, as confiding, as simple-hearted as a child—he, a grown-up, fat, bald-headed man ! Yes, verily the man was a fool and a bore. And, for his sake, I have learned that those terrible names may be terms, not of contempt, but of honour. They may be fools who are sneered at ; but tenfold fools are they who sneer.

AS GOOD AS GOLD. BY MRS. HOEY.

CHAPTER I.

WE were rather proud of the uncompromising sternness, and the undeniable breeziness of St. Magloire-des-Champs. Grey were its cliffs, dangerous were the sands at their feet, sharp and shark's teeth-like were the projections from the face of the steeps on whose summit the junc marin grew sparingly and coarsely, stony were the wide-spreading fields that stretched, a great tableland, for many miles, and the white roads, suggestive of illimitable plodding, and with never a poplar row to break their monotony by the help of its own. It was no place for delicate people ; we used to say that anybody who wanted "coddling" had better not come to St. Magloire for it ; the north-west wind prevailed there a good deal, "fit to blow one's teeth down one's throat," as a visitor indignantly remarked ; and the ways of the place were rough, like

its winds. Grand seas and beautiful skies, these were what St. Magloire-des-Champs had to offer to strangers who came to see what manner of place that was which was so near to England, and as "foreign" as Timbuctoo, and which we, who lived there, enjoyed all the year round.

"We" were my brother Joscelyn, and myself, Joan Quin, at your service; orphan nephew and niece of our good uncle, Count Quin.

We had no remembrance of either of our parents, or of any other house than that to which we had been brought as little children. Our family was Irish, but our father's elder brother, like his father before him, had served for many years in the Austrian service, and was the third of the race who had borne the foreign title of count. It was not backed with much wealth, but we never wanted for anything, and were perfectly happy. I believe I might include the old count in that unusual summary, for he was always cheerful, and he had the youngest smile in his blue eyes—they never lost their blueness—I ever saw in an old face. It was a great trouble, I afterwards knew, that led him to leave the Austrian service and the gay city of Vienna, and settle down in the remote village of St. Magloire; "a pain of the heart," hopeless of cure, for he loved a great lady who was given to a great lord, in whose train the count rode to the wedding, and it spoiled all his life—at least in the world's estimate of the worth of life. However that may have been, it did not harden him; we had the happiest of homes, at the Château des Quatre Vents, situated in the only valley, dell, recess, I don't know what to call the variation of the wide flat tableland. You may form a notion of the place if you picture to yourselves a saucer turned upside down, with a three-cornered piece broken out of the side of it; and set the saucer on a table representing the open sea and the flat sands. In the nook formed by the broken bit, place a fishing town on the smallest scale; a shelving stone quay, generally draped with red-brown fishing-nets, and surrounded by a flotilla of fishing-boats; and far back on a slope, answering to the middle distance in a picture, the Château des Quatre Vents.

It was a grey stone house with a steep leaden roof, with "snuff-boxes" in it, and tall thin windows set in leaden frames, with quaint shields above those on the ground-floor, in whose heraldic devices birds built

their nests and lived happy and undisturbed. It had a flat front, two wings, a courtyard with tall gates which had never been closed within my recollection, a brown marble fountain with a leaden dolphin in the centre, and in a corner near the entrance-gates a porter's lodge with a little garden on the roof, which had formed our delight in our childhood. It was an old house, with curious tufts of grey and yellow growths springing from the walls, and green sprays clinging to the spouts projecting from the eaves; but it was not decayed or forbidding of aspect, and there was a cheery hospitable look about the place which was entirely borne out by the disposition of its owner. The courtyard was a kind of Alameda or fashionable promenade for the dogs and the pigeons of the neighbourhood, and also afforded spots favourable for basking in the sunshine, with contingent possibilities of subsidies from the kitchen, to many an observant cat. A noble animal of the latter species reigned supreme in the porter's lodge, but as he was always fed to repletion, and nothing was ever allowed to disturb his personal comfort, he adopted the philosophy of "live and let live," and admitted the visits of his neighbours with lazy graciousness. At the back of the house were the gardens, and an extensive but stony-hearted farm, forming one side of the little valley which, as the only picturesque "bit" of St. Magloire-des-Champs, was occasionally enlivened by excursionists from a seaport town six miles away. On these occasions the resources of the little auberge were generally overtaxed, and contributions of milk and fruit were freely levied on the Château des Quatre Vents.

With the exception of the vicaire, there was not in the village a person whose education or station fitted him to be an associate for my uncle, but that exception was an important one, for M. Hervé was a scholar and a gentleman. No great pre-ferment had attended his exemplary fulfilment of his vocation; he seemed strangely out of place in that mere hamlet, with the rude fishing people and ourselves for the whole of his flock. But he did not feel this; he was a man of the simplest tastes, and he always maintained that the fisher people are the best class of the community, the most honest, the most religious, the most self-respecting. I do not know whether he was right or wrong in that estimate; the people of St. Magloire were proud and pious, and honest enough, and I liked

them ; only I wish they had not put it into my brother Joscelyn's head that there was no life so delightful as the life of a sailor. The boy used to go out with them, to my alarm and disgust, for I could not bear their dirty boats—which looked so picturesque at a distance—when I came near them ; and when I besought of our uncle not to let him go, Count Quin only laughed at me, and said Joscelyn must be a sailor if he liked, and it was not bad training for him to get a good tossing in the bay where our people mostly fished. Our uncle was not at all affected by the fact that our father had been a sailor, captain of an East Indiaman, indeed, and was lost at sea with his ship.

"If the sons of drowned sailors were never to go to sea, and the sons of killed soldiers were never to carry arms, what would become of the services, my girl ?" he asked me once.

As for my own training, that was a very different affair. My instruction was conducted by my uncle and M. Hervé, in all its branches of solid learning, including military history and the German language, both of which the count held to be indispensable to a polite education ; for the lighter feminine acquirements I was sent to a convent, a mile away, on the bleak heights, where the nuns wrought in the lace and needlework which were traditional accomplishments of their order and had a school for poor children. I was not a poor child, but our good vicaire interceded for me, and I was admitted to learn needlework and singing at the convent.

There was a curious severance between the fishing people and the agricultural people of the district ; but our uncle used to say that it was a common thing ; those two classes never amalgamated in any country. My brother and I took different sides about this ; he was for the sea folk, I for the land, and all because I believed I should never have to part with Joscelyn but for the sea folk. Our uncle did not take either side ; and he was so far justified in his impartiality that both classes of the people treated him with respect, and he possessed a kind of extra-judicial authority and influence over them. A frequent topic of conversation between Count Quin and the vicaire was the varieties and peculiarities of the French character, and our uncle, with all his admiration of the "Great Nation," would contend that their political faithlessness and ingratitude, and the avarice which degraded the thrift of the

lower classes from a quality into a vice, were far more demoralising than the political ignorance and the thriftlessness of "our own people," as the count called the Irish. M. Hervé knew as little of Ireland as most Frenchmen know of any country except France, but he was well acquainted with human nature, and he shared the count's views of the effect of avarice upon the French character fully. In life and death, I heard him say, this vice was the most to be dreaded ; "the glutton and the wine-bibber will renounce their favourite sins when the hour of account draws nigh, but not the money-lover."

"True," was the count's reply, "but the dying glutton cannot eat, the dying drunkard cannot drink ; while the dying miser can lie on his money if he likes, up to the last moment."

"Yes," said the vicaire ; "I have known more than one man do that very thing. Old Antoine Huret, the miller, died with his head on a pillow stuffed with bank-notes, and it would never have been known what he had done with the money but that his niece sent the bedding to be remade, and the pillow fell into honest hands."

"I wonder how Celestine Huret rewarded their honesty," said Count Quin, with a comical shake of the head ; "meagrely I should think ; for if she is not as miserly as her uncle I am much mistaken. I am sorry old Leblond is making a match between his son and Celestine. Jules Leblond is a good fellow, but he has not the courage of a mouse, and the miserly old miller's ugly daughter will lead both father and son a hard life of it, I should say."

"There is another instance of the love of money," said the vicaire. "Leblond knows well what Celestine Huret's character is, how she helped her father 'to grind the faces of the poor' in his time, and has done it since on her own account, and yet he will marry his son to her because she is rich."

"But why does she consent to marry Jules Leblond ?" asked the count. "I understand the old man ; he is only acting according to his class and his kind ; the woman I do not understand."

"It is a marriage of inclination on her side," said the vicaire, "and she has done all the bargaining."

"Bad, that, for the Leblonds," said the count, and then the subject was dropped.

Joscelyn and I resumed it, however, on our own account. Here was an opportunity

for him to praise the sea folk, who made no such mean bargains.

The marriage of old Leblond's son with the daughter of the miserly miller took place in due course, and was fixed in my memory by an event which occurred at the same time. Let me say in passing that I was then just seventeen, and my brother Joscelyn was one year younger, and that I knew that my brother was to go to sea, and that very soon. It was boisterous weather at the middle of September, the wind was on the riot at St. Magloire-des-Champs, and when the little fishing fleet sailed away from the stone quay the women resorted with alacrity to the humble little chapel and the Calvary upon the height, to pray for the men who were gone to wrest the subsistence of them all from the sea. Coming home from the convent of Sainte Agathe, after my lessons, under escort of my uncle, and seeing from the road the fishing-boats, already distant, dotting the foam-flecked sea, I was reminded of, and repeated to him the touching Scottish ballad, "Caller herrin'," with its refrain :

Some may ca' them vulgar fairin',
Ah, they little ken.
Wives and mithers, 'maist despairin',
Ca' them lives o' men !

"It's a rough evening, uncle," I said then, "and there's a bad night in store for the boats. Do you mark the sough in the wind, and the yellow line under the long dark clouds out to sea ?"

"Yes, I do," said the count, and his face was not so serene as usual ; "the vicaire tells me they expect bad weather. I wish Joscelyn had not gone out with them."

"Joscelyn ! Has he gone, uncle ?"

"Yes, in Pierre Pastor's boat. Don't look so frightened, child. Do you suppose he won't have bad weather and stormy seas to face like everybody else ?"

I did not suppose anything of the kind, but I turned cold with an unaccountable fear for all that. And the wind went on rising, until, by the time we turned off the tableland into the steep descent to the Château des Quatre Vents, I had to tie my hat down over my ears with my scarf, and hold tightly by the count's arm to keep my feet.

CHAPTER II.

THE "noce" drove through the village just before dark, and the women gathered in the straggling street, glad of anything that

turned their thoughts from the sea and the weather, to look at the bride and her party. They were all land-folk, and they were merely stared at, except by the count, who stood in the gateway of the Château and waved his hat to the cortége. It was done now, it could not be helped ; he might wish the wedded pair happiness even if he did not much believe in it, and it was Count Quin's way to think all things that were irrevocable for the best. I had a good look at old Leblond's daughter-in-law, and saw a dark-skinned, high-nosed, thin-lipped, hard-featured woman of at least forty. Jules Leblond, a soft, goodnatured-looking fellow, with bulbous blue eyes, straight fair hair, and very large, fat, limp-looking hands, sat by her side in the big lumbering carriage that was well known at every wedding and funeral all round the countryside, looking as if he did not much mind. His silly old father smirked and giggled, and was, doubtless, the happiest of the party. It was a diversion for a few minutes from the heart-sickening anxiety I was in, but there was the long night to be faced, with the wind, now roaring and now moaning, and the horrid knowledge that my brother was on the sea. My uncle and M. Hervé affected to have no anxiety, and to be unconscious of mine, and I left them at an earlier hour than usual. It would be easier to bear quite alone.

It was late before I was wearied out and fell asleep, and they mercifully let me sleep until late on the next morning. When I awoke with a start, to a vague sense of trouble, it was to learn that a storm had raged all night, and was still raging, and that there was a panic in the place. I had seen the women in the agony of fear more than once, but this was the first time I had felt it myself, and I could not tell how I got through that day and the following night. With the next morning suspense at least was at an end ; a fishing-boat from St. Magloire had been lost. It was Pierre Pastor's.

A week later, when, for the first time, I was able to leave the house, I went down with my uncle to the fishermen's houses, and we saw Pierre Pastor's widow and orphan children. The count had seen them daily, and he told me as we walked how patient and resigned the broken-hearted woman was, and how good to the bereaved family the other fisher people were. My uncle looked quite an old man now, and though his grief was manly and reticent, I

could see how poignant it was. I cannot describe our visit to the widow, but I have never forgotten it, and from that moment I felt towards the sea-folk as my brother had felt. When we were on our way home, the few people whom we met saluted us gravely, and cast compassionate looks at my black gown and long mourning veil. A dusty carriage was standing at the door of the auberge, the tired horses were drinking out of a trough.

"The last of the excursions for this season, I suppose," said the count; but Laurent, the aubergiste, standing in the road, informed us that the carriage had not brought an excursion-party, but only one gentleman, an Englishman, who had alighted at the auberge and proceeded on foot to the Château des Quatre Vents. An English visitor to us, and at such a time! We hastened onwards, wondering, and I had just said to my uncle that I would go to my own room, as it could not be necessary that I should see a stranger, when my plan of retreat was frustrated by the approach of our old servant Jacques, who came out to meet us on the road, accompanied by a young man whom no one could have mistaken for any but an Englishman. In the minute which it took them to reach us, I recognised a seagoing air about him, and as he came up I saw that he cast a quick glance of pity at me. But what was the matter with Jacques? Why were tears running down his face, while his mouth was quivering with a smile, and why were his hands shaking? My uncle spoke first.

"They told me at the inn that an English gentleman had enquired for my house."

"Yes, I am he. My name is Annesley. I have come over from Folkestone on purpose to see you. I know a stranger's visit must seem ill-timed, but there's a reason."

He spoke quickly and earnestly; there was excitement in his manner though he strove to subdue it, and he glanced at me, with every second word.

"Let us go into the house and hear it," said the count; and we did so.

When we had passed the door of the salon, my uncle placed me in a chair, and said to the stranger:

"Is your news good?"

"Ah, Monsieur le Comte, how good!" interjected Jacques.

"My news," replied the young Englishman gravely, "is the best which could be

brought to you, and to this young lady. Your nephew, her brother, is alive, and if not well, in a fair way of being so. It was only yesterday that I discovered his identity, and where he came from, or you should have known this sooner."

I had started up at his first words, and the next, though I heard them distinctly, seemed to be uttered a long way off. I had not fainted when they told me Pierre Pastor's boat was lost, but this I knew was fainting, and I knew no more.

I should never have been weary, I think, of lying still and listening, as I did all that evening, to Mr. Annesley's story of how my brother had been picked up by his yacht, after many hours of exposure in the terrible sea, how he had put in at the nearest harbour with his guest, by that time in a stupor, and there had tended him until he was pronounced safe, and was in a fit state to be questioned. Of his own conduct, of his journey to St. Magloire, of his interest and sympathy in us and our feelings, this frank and generous young Englishman made light in so absolutely unaffected a manner that we could not thank him. He had a bright face with merry grey-blue eyes and a brown skin, tanned with the sea breezes, and his dark hair curled closely all over his head; he had a pleasant voice and a charming manner; I think we should have been delighted with him, even had he not brought us such blessed news. I should not have known my uncle before that evening closed, he was so changed, and I never before had any idea of how pleasantly he could talk, and what a store of reminiscences he had. We were joined in the evening by the good vicaire, to whom Jacques had carried the good news early, and who did not fail to remind us of the gratitude we owed to Heaven as well as to the earthly preserver of my brother. Mr. Annesley was an object of interest to the vicaire, and the vicaire to him.

The Leblond marriage turned up in the course of our talk, and Mr. Annesley asked several questions about the French marriage system, and amused the vicaire very much by denouncing the mere idea of interested motives being allowed to influence marriage. He was for love-matches, and nothing but love-matches, he said, and he was sure the count agreed with him.

The count and the vicaire laughed, but did not argue the question, and again the vicaire alluded to the Leblonds. He found,

to his great regret, he told us, that old Leblond had been induced to hand his farm, and indeed everything he possessed, over to his son, unreservedly, as an equivalent for the dót of Huret's daughter ; and he feared the poor old man would find himself a sufferer by this arrangement.

"It is not an uncommon one among the peasant proprietors of France," the vicaire explained to Mr. Annesley, "though of more frequent occurrence in the south than in the north. The old people retire, as it were, and have their place by the fireside, their maintenance, and ease in their declining years, by handing over the property that would be their children's at their death ; then the family is kept together, which, among us, is regarded as a great object. I have heard that in England you do not care so much about that. In some cases the expedient is successful, in others it has been known to lead to great misfortunes and terrible crimes."

"I hope old Leblond's hard-faced daughter-in-law will not poison him to get rid of the cost of him," said my uncle ; "she looks as if she would not stick at a trifile."

"No, no," said the vicaire hastily, "we must not say such a thing even in jest. What will monsieur think of St. Magloire !"

Mr. Annesley declared himself most favourably impressed with St. Magloire, and he seemed to be very much in earnest.

We had sent to the auberge for his portmanteau, and Mr. Annesley was to be our guest. With what feelings did I unlock the door of my brother's room—about which the gloom and mystery of death had hung for all those days—and help to get it ready for his rescuer ! It was to be occupied for one night only, as Mr. Annesley had persuaded my uncle to go with him to England on the following day.

On the next morning, as the count had many things to attend to, it fell to me to be Mr. Annesley's cicerone.

I had put my black garments out of my sight, and I wore my prettiest gown and quite a smart hat, when I went out with him ; and all the people we met nodded kindly to me, and seemed truly glad for me. I did not take Mr. Annesley to the fishermen's houses, I thought Pierre Pastor's widow might find the sight of us hard to bear ; but when I explained that, I found he had been at her house already, long before I was up, and had given her a message from Joscelyn. He did not tell

me that he had added to the message twenty English sovereigns, nor did she until afterwards, when he did not mind my knowing this.

We walked a long distance, and we were out a long time ; but I remember every foot of that road, and every word of that conversation. It was wonderful what an interest Mr. Annesley took in hearing about all our life at St. Magloire, and that he should have found the sayings and doings of two young people who knew nothing at all of the world he lived in amusing ; but so it was. It seemed as if he could never hear enough of the boy whose life he had saved, so I took him to all our haunts, and we called on the dogs whom Joscelyn and I knew, and I was glad to find that they regarded Mr. Annesley as a friend from the first.

I packed up all Joscelyn's clothes, and everything he was likely to want for several weeks, and I tried to write to him ; but a dreadful fluttering came over me ; I had to give up the attempt. I was quite composed again before my uncle and Mr. Annesley went away.

After they were gone, and when I had time and solitude in which to realise it all, I felt as though I had lived through a whole life since yesterday.

St. Magloire-des-Champs was at its breeziest, and the sternness of its winter aspect was settling down upon it, when my uncle returned, bringing with him Joscelyn, and, to my great surprise, Mr. Annesley. The latter had, it appeared, taken a sudden resolution to revisit France, and did not shrink at all from the inclemency and the dullness of St. Magloire. Of course he was a welcome guest at the Château, and nothing could be more uncalled for than Joscelyn's reproaches upon the coldness of my manner to his friend.

"I should have shown more pleasure at sight of him if he had pulled Hector (the biggest of our dogs) or Alcide (the cat at the lodge) out of the water," said my brother, indignantly ; "but there's no accounting for you girls."

I said that I was very sorry, very grateful, very happy ; I said I did not believe that Mr. Annesley could think I was not very glad to see him again ; and somehow, notwithstanding what Joscelyn said, I was not at all uneasy on that point. Whether he had or had not any fault to find with me, Mr. Annesley was in no hurry to leave St. Magloire, and day by day he seemed to

like the place better, and to take more interest in me and it. My uncle had taken to him wonderfully ; he was thoroughly in the family confidence ; and the plans for Joscelyn's future were discussed with him. It was very hard to reconcile me to those plans, for my brother was still bent on going to sea, and Mr. Annesley facilitated them in the most provoking way, offering to use his interest with some great shipowners so that Joscelyn might commence his seafaring life under the most favourable auspices. Even the *vicaire* was against me : it was the boy's calling, he said, and not to be gone against.

"Some day I shall be the captain of a great ship, ever so much bigger than our father's," said Joscelyn exultingly, and apparently oblivious of his father's fate and his own narrow escape.

Joscelyn was very eloquent on the subject of Mr. Annesley's yacht. "She" was a marvel of everything that a "sea-going boat" ought to be ; (he was vexed when I asked him what a land-staying boat was, and said I was too clever to be so foolish !) and her "fittings" were of a superb description. From my brother's talk I began to derive a somewhat awful notion of Mr. Annesley, as a personage, in his own country, of great wealth and importance, and on my hinting this to Joscelyn, he confirmed my fears, with much laughter, and covered me with confusion by his boyish heedlessness in making fun of me on account of them, to Mr. Annesley himself !

"Here's Joan," he said, when Mr. Annesley joined us, as he very often did, on our walk to the quay, "in a fright lest she has been too familiar with your grace, since she finds that your excellency is no end of a grandee of the White Albion ; that your lordship's shadow is tall upon both land and sea ; that, in short, your worship is the *pot de fer* of her favourite fable, only with the difference that your highness helps the *pot de terre* to swim instead of knocking it into smitherines !"

So saying, Joscelyn hooked his arm into Mr. Annesley's, and gave him a playful twirl which brought him exactly in front of my blushing and burning face.

"Don't be so stupid, Jos !" said he, as he shook the boy gently off, and looked, I am bound to say, quite as much embarrassed as I did. "Miss Quin has no such stuff in her thoughts about me. May I walk with you ?" he added, addressing me. "The *vicaire* has just come to see the count, and I took myself away."

Those were happy days for us all, and they passed with the rapidity of pleasant things. Why do I find it difficult to record that which has been in my mind all the time I have been writing ? It is, I think, because even now it seems so wonderful and unreasonable that I, who had never had a compliment paid to me in my life, or been looked at twice by any man, except from motives of the purest benevolence, was forced to see that I was becoming a person of importance in the eyes of Mr. Annesley, and that he was doing all he could to win my regard. Instinct told me this for the first time on the day of Joscelyn's embarrassing speech ; and something beyond that repeated it to me every day after. There was no talk of his proceeding on his journey ; he would probably remain with us until Christmas-tide, when Joscelyn was to go to England and embark upon his first voyage and his new career. I did not shrink so much from the idea now, I did not think so much about it. So two or three more happy weeks went by, and I was absorbed in the new world of thought and feeling in which I was living. I wonder whether everyone will be dreadfully shocked at my admission that I loved the young Englishman who had saved my brother's life ! I am bound to make it, whether or no. Things went on around me very much as usual, inside and outside the Château des Quatre Vents ; my uncle and our guest were the best of friends, but I do not think either my uncle or my brother knew what I knew—that he was staying with us on account of me. The *vicaire* knew it—of that I felt perfectly certain ; also that he approved of Mr. Annesley. I remember every hour of those weeks, after all these years, with their delightful emotion, and their suspense, in which there was no pain, because, however much I wondered, I did not really doubt.

Among the matters that were talked of, but in which I could not force myself to be interested, was the state of things at the Leblonds' farm. The treatment of the old man by his daughter-in-law was becoming a public scandal, and everyone pitied the victim and blamed the supineness of the son, who allowed his father to be bullied and ill-treated. The wife whom old Leblond had purchased for Jules was a cruel, avaricious shrew, and she made the lives of both miserable. Neglect, privation, and insult were the portion of old Leblond in the house where he had once been

master, and where he was debarred by a woman's ingenious malice from any share in the increased comfort that her money had procured. The woman was hopeless ; she was not to be ruled by love or fear, for she was incapable of either. The old man used to come up to the Château des Quatre Vents, and tell his grievances to Jacques, and occasionally to the count himself, and he would potter about our fields and garden in a melancholy way, that inspired Joscelyn and myself with great pity. Jules Leblond sought consolation from a source which is, to do them justice, not extensively resorted to by the French : he took to drinking, and the little auberge had him for a constant customer. The influence of these circumstances upon my future, though indirect, was destined to be considerable. I am now about to state how it was that they exerted any.

"Joan," said Joscelyn to me one day, "I want you to help me to play a trick on that hag. I really can't stand the poor old fellow's wretched, half-starved look—they are feeding him in the kitchen just now—and the vicaire's telling Annesley that if Leblond had kept anything at all back from the vixen she might have been held within bounds by her anxiety to get hold of that too, has put a notion into my head. But, first, I must swear you to secrecy—towards everybody, Annesley included, mind. Are you ready to be sworn ?"

"Of course I am."

"Then we'll take the oath for granted. Now come along to your own room, and get out the big box with the brass edges that you keep all your gimcracks in. I want to have a look at them."

"What for ?"

"Never mind ; I'll tell you when I've seen the things."

We went to my room and I produced the box. It contained a number of valuable things, my sole personal wealth, inherited from my mother chiefly : there were several articles of Chinese and Indian jewellery, cameos, strings of Turkish sequins, a lot of Indian coins, and some fine pearl ornaments. Joscelyn disregarded all my "rubbish," as he contemptuously called my treasures, except the strings of sequins ; these he removed from the box and closely examined, comparing the size of the coins with that of a ten-franc piece.

"Very much of a size," he said ; "but these are not gold, are they ?"

"I believe not ; I was told they are silver, washed with gold, to make them

prettier to wear in the hair and on the neck."

"Just as good as gold for my purpose. Now I'm going to take a hundred of them, and I don't mean to tell you what I intend to do with them until it's done. But you shall have them back all safe when they have served my purpose."

"Oh Joscelyn, and you said I was to consider myself sworn to secrecy !"

"Certainly, and so you are. You will keep the secret ever so much better for not knowing anything about it ; and you will not be in the scrape, if I get into one, with the count."

He went off in his boyish way with my Turkish coins, and I thought very little about the matter, for my mind and my heart were full of myself and another.

Before that week came to an end, I had a good right to account myself the happiest girl in existence, for George Annesley had asked me to be his wife, and my consent had been ratified by my uncle's. We had a very friendly though agitating discussion of our plans, and George besought my uncle to give up the Château des Quatre Vents and come to England. To this, however, the count would not consent ; he liked his breezy old home, and its independent ways, and he meant to keep them.

If anything could have dashed my happiness it was this refusal. I thought so sadly of him, all alone, when I should be married and away, and Joscelyn at sea ; but George consoled me by assuring me the count would change his mind.

"He will get tired of his loneliness, and come to us," said George, "and we will give him the Ivy House at Annesley Towers if he won't live with us, and we will clear the big library of all the books on military history and fill his shelves with them, and he shall be as happy as a king, or, better still, as you and I."

I was consoled and delighted ; but in my heart I did not think any one in the world could ever be as happy as he and I.

They talked a great deal about business matters which I did not understand. I only remember my uncle's saying, with his hand upon my head, as he used to lay it there when I was a child :

"Gold and silver has she none ; but she is as good as gold, and better."

Christmas came and passed, and Joscelyn

was to leave us, George going with him, early in the year. It was about a week after New Year's Day, when my brother came to me, his bright eyes dancing with a mischievous delight, and gave me back my Turkish sequins, unstrung, and in a rough canvas bag.

"I've done it," he said ; "I've restored peace and harmony to the blighted home of the Leblonds. I've beaten the vicaire on his own ground. Madame Leblond is a perfect lamb, and the pearl of daughters-in-law. Old Leblond has a well-stuffed fauteuil at the chimney-corner, an édredon for his poor old legs, bouillon gras whenever he likes, and old Huret's cachet vert at least twice a week at his dinner. And you should just see her coddling the old man, and hear her wheedling him ! It is much better than any play that our limited opportunities have given us an opportunity of seeing, I can tell you."

"What on earth do you mean ?"

"I'll tell you now ; and here, you will please to remember your oath comes into operation. I made old Leblond understand that if it was the fact that he had given up everything he possessed that made Madame Catherine so brutal to him, he might get a pull upon her by persuading her that she was mistaken ; that he had a secret treasure unknown to everybody, and that by very good conduct, and throwing him completely off his guard, she might wheedle him out of it. As she is a miser, and the daughter of a miser, I calculated that it would be easy enough to make her believe that other people had hoarded money also. He took to the notion very readily, but he objected, first, that his son would know he was only deceiving Madame Catherine ; and secondly, that she would never believe anything but the sight of the hoarded treasure. To this I replied, that he must not attempt to take his son into his confidence, as he was not to be trusted, and that he might be quite sure Madame Catherine would say nothing to her husband, if the thing were managed as I should arrange it, for she should behold the bona-fide treasure with her own eyes. Now I suppose you begin to guess what I wanted with your sequins ? Exactly so ; I see it in your nod. I unstrung the sequins, mixed up some French money with them, put them in an old sample seed-bag, and gave them to old Leblond, with instructions to watch for a favourable opportunity of letting the sweet creature see him count his money ; but I charged him not to let it

be off his own person for one moment ; he was to carry the bag in his breast with the string round his neck day and night. The opportunity arose very soon, for one of Madame Catherine's amiable habits is that of spying through keyholes. This she did, just as the moon was shining through the poor old man's garret-window ; and he was all ready for her with the coins spread out in the patch of moonlight on the floor, and himself on his knees, gloating over them in the true miserlike attitude. He acted it all for me in the greenhouse. It was great fun. He heard her breathe deeply, and she put her hand on the latch, but very softly, and withdrew it in a few moments. Next morning she was silent and thoughtful, and let him have as much sugar in his coffee as he wanted. Since then she has been undergoing a complete transformation, but she has not said a word ; indeed she has been singularly silent about everything, and she has watched him incessantly when he has been in the house. Everyone notices the change, and the neighbours shake their heads and think Madame Catherine must be going to die and is 'converting herself.' Old Leblond has kept me informed of the progress of the affair, and as I think she will never venture to ill-treat him again, and wanted you to have your sequins all safe before I go away, I gave him instructions two days ago for the last act of the little play. Every night she comes and peeps through the keyhole—the room is a very comfortable one now—and the night before last she saw the old man walking about, hugging the bag to his breast, and muttering : 'Not safe, not safe ; I must bury it. No safety except in the earth ! But where ? — where ?' And yesterday, when he went out she followed him at a distance. He came up to the château as usual, and while he was talking to me she was hanging about, but too far off to hear a word of what we were saying. The final scene took place last night, while you and Annesley were talking your nonsense together in the salon, and I assure you it was quite dramatic. It might have been a murder and the burial of the body ! I took up my position at the back of the cucumber-frame, close by the old well, in the potager, and lay close. Presently, under the pale and watery moonbeams, in creeps old Leblond—and, by-the-bye, narrowly escapes tumbling into the well, for the cover is off—his hand on the bag, his old jaws mopping and mowing.

He searches for a spade—I had put one in readiness—digs a hole at the side of the cucumber-frame, squats on the ground, counts the money very audibly—for his precious daughter-in-law is behind the hedge on the other side of the walk, intently watching him—and drops the coins back into the bag. Then he kneels, with his back to the amiable Madame Catherine, and with many groans and moans inters his treasure, carries the spade to a remote corner of the garden, and steals away, followed by the spy."

"And you dug up the bag?"

"Not at all; it never was buried. Nothing at all reposes in the grave wherein are centred the hopes of Madame Catherine; and old Leblond honestly and punctually restored to me the properties of our little drama this morning. His daughter-in-law is more than ever devoted to him now that she thinks the treasure is absolutely safe, beyond the reach of all accidents, and everybody's knowledge except her own."

"But suppose she goes to dig it up, and finds it is not there?"

"I have thought of that, and I will tell you what she will do. She will think she has mistaken the place, and she will dig above it and below it, and in a line with it and all round it; she will return to the charge again and again, for seeing is believing, and she believes that she saw him bury the money; but even if she is convinced it is not there, she will only suppose that old Leblond has buried it elsewhere, and watch him more closely still. But she will not ill-treat the old man again; she has something more to get out of him, if only"—and here Joscelyn assumed a comical air of melodrama—"the secret on his death-bed."

I locked up my sequins, and we laughed and talked a great deal about Joscelyn's practical joke.

About a week after Mr. Annesley and Joscelyn had left the Château des Quatre Vents, when I was settling down into the routine of writing and receiving letters daily, and the count and the vicaire had resumed their winter evenings' chess battles, there arose a disturbance in St. Magloire-des-Champs. Jules Leblond's wife, whose odd abstracted manner had recently attracted a good deal of attention, was missing. Jules and his father came to my uncle, as they always did in a difficulty, and told him about the woman's disappearance. On several occasions lately,

Jules said, she had been absent from home, leaving him and his father together, but she had explained her absence quite reasonably. They had been getting on very well together, notwithstanding her mean ways, for the last few weeks, and Jules had forsaken the auberge; but she had gone out after nightfall on the previous evening—she was always talking about the moonlight, Jules said, and everyone knows that is a bad sign—saying she was going down to the Château to speak to the house-keeper about some household matter. She had not returned. No one belonging to the Château had seen her. The great gate, as I have said, invariably lay open, and she might have passed in and out unnoticed; but it was explained that persons coming from the heights never used the chief entrance; they would come in through the small gate that gave admittance into the potager.

A sudden dread struck me at the mention of the potager. Had Madame Leblond's disappearance any connection with the supposed-to-be-buried money? I took old Leblond aside and asked him the question. The first impulse of the cunning old man was to affect ignorance of my meaning; but I told him briefly that I knew what had been done, and that he would not come to any harm by telling me the truth. Then he acknowledged that he in his turn had enjoyed the pleasure of watching his daughter-in-law, and had been aware that three times she had made vain search for the supposed money. He did not doubt, though he had not taken the trouble to follow her last night, that her errand had been the same; but he was totally at a loss to account for her disappearance.

"You shall be held quite harmless," I said; "but you must tell the whole truth to the count at once." I was trying to get the room cleared, so that the story of Joscelyn's expedient should be told to my uncle without any superfluous hearers, when the gardener rushed in, and in a state of excessive terror announced a dreadful discovery—that of the dead body of Jules Leblond's wife. She had fallen into the uncovered well in the potager and been drowned!

I was married to George Annesley in London, and although he has not given up the Château des Quatre Vents, my uncle has taken wonderfully to the Ivy House.

AN "OUT-OF-THE-WAY" STORY.

BY W. W. FENN.

"FREEDOM and quiet, fresh air and sea-bathing." This was the doctor's prescription. "But," he added, "don't go to a fashionable watering-place, you'll get no rest there; find an out-of-the-way spot where there is no noise but the sound of the sea, which should soothe you to sleep; and, by-the-way, a pair of blue spectacles with large side flaps to keep off the glare would be advisable. One word more," said he; "forgive my appearing personal, but let me suggest that you should get your hair cut—a man with your excitable brain should wear it as short as possible, especially when it grows as thick as yours. Have a regular convict's crop, you know. Never mind your appearance. Write me a line when you have been away a fortnight, and tell me how you are. Good-morning!"

Why, I knew the very place to go to, the most out-of-the-way spot in the world. I had often longed to go, but, of course, like all commercial men in these high-pressure days, could never find the time.

Now since I had lately been unable to sleep, had once or twice turned suddenly dizzy in the street, and been seized with a fainting fit whilst sitting at my desk, I began to see that, if I did not find time for a holiday, I should have to find time to be ill.

Hey, then! for Dulworth Cove, the prettiest, quaintest, and quietest out-of-the-way nook for a bather on the south coast. Was it not a familiar acquaintance already? I knew all about it from my friend Burnish's sketches as well as if I had been there. Nine or ten miles from the dreary old Southshire town of Tareham, or five from the little shed of a station at Fleece—a certain fly at the former or an uncertain lift in a cart at the latter, it did not signify. The cove inn would sure to have room; or if it had not, there were two or three cottage-lodgings where quiet, fogey-like provincials were in the habit of putting up when they wanted a breath of sea air. Otherwise Dulworth was unfrequented, almost unknown. The time-bill at the London terminus showed that the train I hit upon stopped at Fleece, so to Fleece I booked.

The month was August, the heat great, and town intolerable. By the time we were skirting Westhampton Waters, I

began to feel better. The breeze smelt salt already, and the cropping I had undergone had literally taken a weight off my head. Nevertheless, I think it was overdone, for nature, apparently exhausted by her expenditure of strength on a luxuriant head of hair, had left my cheeks and chin as bare as a baby's; and now, after Truefit's operation and in my blue spectacles, I looked the veriest scarecrow imaginable.

"Fleece! Fleece! Fleece!" shouted the station porter.

"Plenty of cry, and very little Fleece," thought I as I got out of the train, for a smaller place boasting of a station it would have been hard to find. Half-a-dozen straggling cottages made up the village, and but for the luck of finding a fisherman's cart returning to Dulworth, I should probably have had to carry my own portmanteau and trudge the five miles on foot. However, Mr. Richard Tye, fisherman, was very willing, after some confabulation, to give me a lift, and we were soon side by side jolting along in his little ramshackle vehicle. Tye was a character, and shall speak for himself. He soon told me what I chiefly wanted to know—namely, that there would be no difficulty in getting a room at the inn.

"T'other lodgings be's pretty full, I reckon," he said, "for there bean't many on 'em, and the last—their at Mrs. Hutchett's—was took yesterday by a lady. And terrible solitary and sad-lookin' she be's too, surely. Missus Hutchett says to my missus as she'd heerd her sobbin' and cryin' well-nigh all last night through, and I see her myself up on the tops this mornin', all dressed in black, so miserable-like as it made my heart ache. She was staring away, to the west'ard there, with tearful eyes, as if she 'spect'd summut to come up out of the deep. There, that be Missus Hutchett's, that little cottage there, agin the church," he added, pointing with his whip as we were now winding down the ever-narrowing road towards the sea. "This 'ere be's the beginning of Dulworth village like, and it's a'most half a mile more to the hotel."

During our progress past a succession of old-fashioned thatched cottages, each standing in its patch of kitchen-garden, with here and there a rustic draw-well, and an old weather-worn tree or two, we overtook and passed the lady in question, and she certainly bore out my companion's description to the letter. Although I abstained from anything more than a

furtive glance, I saw that she had a pair of eyes which, as they met mine, even through my blue spectacles, imparted a peculiar sensation. Whether it was their natural look, I do not know, but there was an appealing, beseeching expression in them which was very touching, as though their owner was looking everywhere for help—a help that was lost, but on which she had once relied and was hoping to find again. This was the involuntary interpretation I put upon her expression. I am not a romantic man, but Tye's few words, and the aspect of the lady, absorbed my thoughts until I reached the inn—indeed until I went to sleep that night.

Quarters tolerably comfortable; surroundings just what I expected; great relief to be in such air in such weather. A "header" into the glistening waters of the cove; the freedom of the beach with only a stray coastguard or fisherman in the distance; no bother of bathing-machines or crowds of watering-place idlers; this was, of course, the very spot for me to pull round in, and I had not been twenty-four hours at Dulworth before I felt a different man.

For days and days I spent the most monotonous and regular life; by degrees extending my walks along the cliff-tops right and left, and so recognising in their turn all the leading features of the coast, as I had seen them in Burnish's sketches—faithful Burnish!—and what a fine prospect it was from that coastguard look-out just above the inn! Ensonced in the little turf shelter, and soon on good terms with the man on duty, I used to sit for hours watching the expanse of sunlit sea, and indolently gazing through my blue spectacles at the glittering headlands. I knew them all: there was St. Maurice Head in the far east, Peaceborough, Beacon Bay, Dulworth; and to the westward, Maresfall, Gurdle, Greynose; and finally, in the extreme distance, the fashionable watering-place of Curdsmouth, dominated by the rocky promontory of the great convict settlement at Fortland. Very soon, however, these points of natural interest faded before the human, and the mysterious lady in black, young and beautiful as she was, became the chief object of my contemplative moods. With not more than half-a-dozen nondescript visitors wandering over the downs and along the shore, this solitary figure was necessarily conspicuous.

In addition, likewise, there was in her manners and habits sufficient to attract attention. All day long she would sit at

one or other of the most commanding outlooks in the immediate neighbourhood, and all day long she was gazing, often through a field-glass, in one direction. Wander where I would on the cliffs, I came across her sitting and staring perpetually at the western horizon.

Sometimes, too, I came upon her at the coastguard look-out, trying to use the blue-jacket's telescope. She spoke little to the man, and there was no abatement either in the sadness or in the appealing, beseeching expression of her face. My interest in her increased, and I casually asked Mr. Tye one morning, whilst he was pottering about amongst the little group of boats drawn up on the beach of the cove, if he had heard her name.

He had "heerd" it was Smith, but he could give me no information beyond that she was kind o' half furriner he thought, a poor lonesome body, never had no letters, gave very little trouble, had come from London the day before I arrived, as he had told me when he druv me over, and had paid her rent reg'lar.

This rather lent a whet to my curiosity, unoccupied as I was, and a strong desire to make her acquaintance took possession of me. I would have liked to talk to that poor woman; to have seen if I could do anything to help her, and, if possible, to alleviate the terrible burthen of sorrow which was evidently weighing her down.

A fortnight passed. One afternoon, after a broiling hot day, and just when a gentle breeze, springing up from the south, carried away the banks of sea-fog in which the coast had been enveloped for twenty-four hours and made locomotion impossible, I strolled far away across the downs and struck the coast at a greater distance from the inn than I had ever yet wandered to.

I suppose I was four or five miles from Dulworth, for I could see the flagstaff of the next coastguard station to it considerably in my rear. As there was still plenty of daylight, it occurred to me that, before turning homewards, it would be pleasant to have a bathe in yonder tempting little bay of blue-green water lying still as a mill-pond, and reflecting vividly a long reef of rocks which shut it in. So, descending the crumpling, but here comparatively low cliffs to the beach, I was about to undress under the shelter of the ridge of rocks, when I fancied I heard someone moving on the other side.

The breeze had quite died away again,

and the faint ripple which gently kissed the shore only served to increase the delicious evening silence pervading all around. The solitude of the place, too, was not the least of its attractions; scarcely a living creature had been visible for hours, therefore the crunch, crunch as of a furtive footstep so close, was a little startling.

Immediately scrambling to the top of the rocks I looked over on the other side, whence the sound had come, and as I could see nobody, I thought my ears had deceived me. When I had waited and watched for fully ten minutes, and still saw nobody, I was convinced I had been deceived.

The noise, probably, was caused by nothing but an accidental shifting of some of the little heaps of shingle at the base of the rocks, such as frequently happens when the tide has just left them. Thus reassured, I was soon stripped and revelling in the delights of my dip. The water felt like tepid milk; it was the most delicious bath I had ever known, and I swam straight away out, without looking back, for a long distance to a little patch of table rock which the ebbing tide was just revealing. Reaching it, I stretched myself lazily, otterlike, upon its smooth top and took a rest. For several minutes I lay looking out seawards, then I turned round, and as my eyes fell upon the shore I saw, to my consternation, a man partly undressed, stooping over my pile of clothes.

I was so taken aback for the first moment, that I did not even call out, but when I descried him rapidly putting them on, I was in the water again, shouting my best in an instant, and swimming back for dear life.

But, by Jove, there is far too great a distance between me and the land to make it possible to stop the thief. He is even now hustling on my shooting-coat, and I cannot hope to overhaul him if he takes to his heels, as he assuredly will. Yes, there he goes! running with all his might up towards the cliffs, as he crams his head into my lovely soft brown wideawake, and drags the brim of it down over his eyes. By the time I touch the shore, breathless, he has disappeared round a mass of broken cliff, and I see him no more!

The first impulse is still to keep up the chase, and I actually run a few yards up the beach ere I remember my condition. In this guise, however, pursuit is out of the question, and I return to where my clothes had been, and where now are

lying, scattered about, what the scoundrel has left of his own.

It is impossible to describe my disgust at the thought of having to put on these garments; it was worse than losing my own. For the latter were gone, every stitch, from the guernsey and shirt down to my socks and shoes. Gone! and with them the contents of the pockets—keys, money, pocket-book, and spectacles. And what was left in exchange? A more motley nondescript attire had never been seen. The coat was of a strange friezy homespun, with a waistcoat and knickerbockers to match—but their colour! Half drab, half yellow; the first a dust-coloured brownish grey, the latter bright and staring as cadmium; the hues seemed arranged, moreover, to show them off to the full. First a yellow sleeve, then a drab breast, next a yellow breast, then last a drab sleeve, and below the drab breast one yellow leg, below the yellow breast a leg of drab. All this I took in as I laid out the wardrobe for inspection on the shingle. There was apparently no hat or cap, but I found a pair of heavy high-laced ankle-jacks, fit for a navvy, a common blue striped shirt, flannel drawers and jersey, and last of all, a pair of long stout stockings, blue ribbed, with narrow bars of red at intervals around the leg. Who, in Heaven's name, could be the owner of a kit like this?

A puff of chill night air, wafted from the sea as the evening closed around, reminded me that for the nonce, at least, I myself must be their happy possessor, for to return home utterly unclothed was of course impossible. Fortunately my disguise was tolerably clean, and fitted me fairly well, but the closer I became acquainted with the clothes the less I liked their style. I found now a sort of pattern stamped upon the cloth—a curious device in black—two sides of a triangle with a straight line inside from the apex, and these were sprinkled plentifully but at irregular distances all over the drab-and-yellow suit. On the right sleeve, again, there was a circular patch of drab bearing the mysterious letters "P. S." and below them the figures fourteen, and on a third line eight thousand four hundred and thirty-two. The boots, which I put on last, were big, but not uncomfortable. They carried tremendous nails upon the soles, which I found, on looking back at my footprints on a patch of sand, made a mark exactly similar to the quaint black pattern on my clothes.

I know not how long I was attiring myself in this wondrous dress, but I had just put on the coat, when I was aroused from my speculations as to what it could mean by the sudden appearance of a couple of coastguardmen hurrying down the cliffs towards me. Before I had time to congratulate myself, as I thought, on a rescue from my dilemma in having to return home in this disguise, the foremost of the new comers addressed me, as he approached.

"Hullo, mister," he said, "we've nabbed ye, have we? You're a cool customer to go bathin' here on the open beach."

By this time they were both within a few yards of me, and the second one, I saw to my astonishment, carried, menacingly, a heavy pistol.

"Now, look here," went on this latter, raising the weapon, "don't go for to make a bolt of it, or you'll have a bullet through your leg in a moment. Those are my orders, and I'll carry 'em out, so help me. You are our prisoner, and you'd best give in quietly."

"Your prisoner!" I exclaimed, aghast and bewildered by the men's behaviour and words.

"Yes," said the first speaker, "and we mean to collar the five pounds reward, so don't you give us no trouble, and we won't do you no mischief."

"Wh—wh—what do you mean?" I stammered.

"Oh come, don't let's have any of your kid. You know what we mean; though, how you could be such a soft as to go for to show yourself in broad daylight beats me," said one.

"Yes, and how we come not to see ye afore, beats me," said the other; "howsoever, come along quietly, for your game's up now."

With this he put his arm through mine and began to urge me away. I resisted slightly, for I was still perfectly in the dark.

"Now, look here, once for all," said the first man, "we've been a-looking for you all day, and we don't mean to let you go now. Will you come quietly, or won't ye?"

"Come? Yes, of course I'll come; but where to? I don't understand."

"Ha, ha, ha! You don't understand. I like that, upon my life I do. Why, back to Fortland Prison, to be sure. So put your best leg foremost, or we shan't get ye in afore the gates are locked for the night."

So suddenly had this phase of the affair developed, that it took me several minutes ere I could realise its true meaning, but as I found myself mechanically struggling up the broken ground between the two men, the truth began to dawn.

"Do you mean to tell me," I said, "that you take me for an escaped convict?"

"Looks like it," was the answer.

"But, you know, it's all a mistake. I've had my own clothes stolen."

"Oh yes, it's all a mistake; we know that, and you'll know it too, by-and-by."

"Now," I said, "don't be impudent, or it may be the worse for you. I can explain the whole business perfectly, and then you'll see you are utterly in the wrong."

We were nearly at the top of the cliff now, and no sooner had we reached it than I saw a policeman in a ramshackle cart driving across the downs towards us, followed by three or four boys.

"Got him, have ye, mates?" shouted the constable as we neared him. "All right," went on the man, pulling up, "there'll be room for us all in the cart. Now, my cockywax, let's have the darbies on;" and, almost before I knew it, or could resist, the policeman had sprung from the cart and I was handcuffed.

Vain was it for me to protest, to explain, to remonstrate, to insist on being driven back to Dulworth, where, as I averred, immediate proof would be forthcoming of my identity. The horse's head was persistently kept by the policeman in the very opposite direction, after I had been hoisted into the cart and seated between the two blue-jackets. All expostulations were useless. My captors alternately jeered, chaffed, or swore at me for one of the coolest blades they had ever come across in their days, and finally telling me to "shut up," lighted their pipes and refused to talk further. Night was now fast setting in, and by the time we had left the downs, and struck into a by-lane upon more level land, the little following of shouting boys and the two or three labourers (who had gathered about the cart as the news of the capture of the escaped convict got wind) fell off. Not to dwell on my sensations unduly, as the full gravity of the situation began to dawn upon me, as in silence, for awhile, we jogged along the road towards Fortland, I will only say that I gladly hailed the obscurity which the ever-deepening twilight threw round us. I endeavoured to console myself by the thought that at least, when we reached

our destination, I should have no difficulty in making the authorities see the mistake.

Nevertheless certain misgivings would arise that this might not be so easy at first, and that at the best I should have to pass an unpleasant night either in or out of Fortland Prison. Amongst some fifteen hundred convicts, each recognisable only by his number, it was quite likely that that on the sleeve of this accursed garb would be held sufficient to warrant the assumption that its wearer was its legitimate owner, and the story of the misappropriation would hardly be credited. Then the convict crop which the doctor had insisted on? Why, that would be almost confirmatory on the first blush of the thing! My heart sank, and I turned deadly sick as these possibilities occurred to me.

"Is this Curdsmouth?" I said at length, as we gradually neared the straggling outskirts of a well-lighted town.

"Just as if you didn't know," was the reply from one of the coastguard; "anyone'd think you was as innocent as a lamb, to hear you talk. Why don't you shut up?"

"Do you mean to say that you will persist in driving me through the public streets in this fashion?" I exclaimed, goaded to desperation by the thought of such an ignominious progress.

"P'raps you'd like to go in a carriage and four, would ye? I reckon the fiver won't run to that," was the reply.

"Well, my fine fellows," I said, "this will be the worst day's job you ever did, as you will find by-and-by, and I shall appeal to some of the passers-by to give me assistance," I went on, hardly knowing what I said.

"Yes, and a mighty lot of good you'll get by that; it's more than anyone's place is worth to interfere with us and you in that dress, let alone your having been up to this game before."

"What game?" I asked.

"Why, breaking prison. This ain't your first offence in this line, as you well know, else you wouldn't be striped yellow alternate, like an old wasp."

Worse and worse! but here was the explanation in full of my strange motley.

The town was alive with evening loungers and merry with music and laughter, as we drove along the gas-lit quays and esplanades. Many a curious glance was directed towards the vehicle in which I was such a conspicuous figure

—unable to hide my face in the slightest degree—hatless, handcuffed as I was.

"Fancy," I said to myself, "if that sweet-looking woman at Dulworth had chanced to be in Curdsmouth this evening and had recognised me, or if any of my friends or one of my partners could have seen me?"

One of my partners! This thought brought some relief. Oh that such good luck might have been mine! Why, of course, the first thing I should have to do would be to communicate with my partners if the authorities at the prison proved as obdurate as did my captors. By way of making me more comfortable, these humorous dogs would, from time to time, interchange jocose remarks at my expense with stray friends, as we passed often at a walking pace through some of the narrower thoroughfares; and I was not a little relieved when eventually we came out upon the deserted causeway road running along the top of the great ridge of beach by which the promontory of Fortland is reached.

A hazy moon shed a ghostly light on the placid expanse of sea right and left, whilst straight in front loomed ominously the rocky elevation whereon is established the huge penal settlement.

Less than half an hour then brought us, by a steep ascent, to the prison-gates. The aspect of these gloomy portals, illuminated by a solitary lamp, which made the darkness of the shadow in which they stood more evident, struck me with a chill.

"Abandon hope, all ye who enter here," they seemed to say, and truly the last remnants of my hope and courage evaporated at the sight. Accustomed to a quiet uneventful life, I trust I may be excused for any cowardice I displayed.

I confess, as I have said, I had never been very confident of making my identity clear at once, even to the officials, after the experience I had had of the way my protests were received by my captors. I foresaw many difficulties, and perhaps, from being out of health and unnerved, my imagination magnified these, but not very greatly, as will be seen. Any way, I was in no mood to take the matter as a joke, as I suppose a man in strong health might have done, and I was so bewildered by the novelty, and, to say the least of it, the disagreeable character of the situation, that I do not pretend to remember in detail what followed. I am only conscious that there was much congratulatory jargon interchanged about my recapture between

my escort and the stern-looking official who unlocked, and then relocked the swinging gates the moment I had been made to descend from the cart, and had entered the outer precincts of the prison.

My request to see the governor was treated with derision. When the policeman had removed my handcuffs, and he and the coastguard had given their names and taken their departure, I was conducted through some open ironwork gates to an inner line of security by a second blue-coated warder armed with a short sword at his side, and carrying a bull's-eye lantern.

There was an endless unlocking and unbolting, and relocking and rebolting of heavy gates and wickets, and a few roughly given orders and counter-orders. I was spoken of simply as eight thousand four hundred and thirty-two, and every attempt I made to speak and explain, every protest I offered, every appeal I uttered, was met by the stern command, "Be silent."

"Hold your tongue, will you? or you'll be put in the dark cell," at length said a third official to whom I was passed on. "We've had enough trouble with you as it is, and we'll take good care you don't step it again in the fog, as you did this morning."

"I tell you——" I was going on.

"There now, that's enough," interrupted he, "into the dark cell you go, and no mistake this time, if you say another word. I've given you fair warning, and now you shall take the consequences."

We were just then entering a long, lofty, and dimly-lighted hall, having tier above tier of small doors running round it which were approached by flights of iron stairs and galleries. Another warder, carrying a huge bunch of keys, here came forward, moving noiselessly by reason of soft slippers which he wore.

"Eight thousand four hundred and thirty-two just brought back. Give him his own cell if he'll be quiet," said my latest escort.

A door on the ground-floor was quickly unlocked, and I was just on the point of being thrust in, when I observed the man look at me closely and start.

"Ah," I cried eagerly in a moment, "you see the mistake—you see I am not the personage you take me for. For God's sake be reasonable, and understand what you are doing."

The other official came up as I continued :

"If you won't take the responsibility upon yourselves, let me see the governor at once. I tell you I had been bathing, and my clothes——"

"I think there is some mistake, Mr. Rawkins; this is not our customer," broke in the warder, scratching his head with a key and looking dubiously at him who had threatened me with darkness.

"What! have we been fooled again?" said the latter. "How is this? Stay, I'll ring the governor's bell. Hold on a bit!"

At last then there was a prospect of my being listened to. The warder who had had charge of the real criminal of course saw the mistake, the other men through whose hands I had hitherto passed naturally were not familiar with his features, and had accepted the dress as sufficient and conclusive evidence.

"Come with me, but keep silent," said Mr. Rawkins; "there's some hanky-panky going on which the governor must see to."

More unlocking and relocking, more traversing of dimly-lighted passages and corridors, and then we entered a large room fitted up like an office. A bell was rung, the gas was turned up, several more warders came in, and finally a good-looking soldier-like gentleman, of about forty, dressed in a suit of gray dittos—obviously the governor. Eyeing me keenly as he passed, he took his seat at a desk, and in an authoritative tone demanded :

"What was the matter?"

"I can explain," I said, "in two minutes."

"Silence," said the gentleman peremptorily.

Mr. Rawkins here stepped forward and told his story.

"And this is not your man, you say?" said the governor. "Who in the name of mischief is he then?"

"My name is——"

"Silence," repeated the governor.

"Well, sir, that remains to be seen," continued Rawkins. "Anyhow, Mr. Muffet says he is not eight thousand four hundred and thirty-two—not Jollett."

"No, he is not Jollett certainly," attested two of the bystanding warders, scrutinising me curiously.

"But he has the clothes on of eight thousand four hundred and thirty-two," said the governor, turning red; "the clothes Jollett escaped in this morning. What is the meaning of this? Connivance at escape, I suppose. Where are the men who brought him here?"

"They've left, sir," said the gatekeeper,

who had recently entered ; " but they will be up in the morning first thing."

" Then lock him up till the morning," said the governor angrily, and rising from his chair. " It is felony to assist in the escape of a convict, and that's what this means."

The prospect of remaining incarcerated after all, just as I was rejoicing at having obtained freedom, was too much. Summoning all my resolution, and totally disregarding the attempts to silence me, with which I was met when I first began to speak, I went on, and in a loud voice blurted out the main facts of my case.

" And mind you, sir," I added, gaining fresh courage as I saw that my words had made some impression on the gentleman in grey, " mind you, sir, if you keep me here after this explanation an action will lie against you for false imprisonment, and I shall get heavy damages."

" Can this possibly be a true story ? " said the governor, looking round to his officials doubtfully. Then, resuming his seat after a moment's hesitation, he enquired, " What proof can you bring ? "

" Simply by sending over to Dulworth. Half-a-dozen people there will tell you that what I say is a fact."

" What ! that you had your clothes stolen whilst you were bathing ? "

" Well, nobody, I suppose, actually saw that, or I shouldn't be here, but they can— Stay, to clear up all your doubts, telegraph at once to my own home, or, better still, to one of my partners."

The governor bit his lip, looked at me searchingly, and then taking up a pen, said :

" Well, give me your name and address, and that of your partners, as you say."

I did as he requested.

He continued :

" Now, I don't wish to appear discourteous, or to disbelieve your story, but I must be assured of its truth. I am in a post of great responsibility here, sir, and I can take nothing for granted. It is too late to communicate with your friends to-night, and I am afraid you must stay here till the morning."

" What ! in durance vile ? "

" Certainly not ; I can accommodate you, I daresay, with a shakedown in my quarters, and you will understand that I detain you very reluctantly. Get a decent suit of liberty clothes, Mr. Rawkins," he went on, turning to that functionary with

a grim smile, " and let this—" he hesitated for a second, and then added quickly, " this gentleman make a change. He has at least restored us part of our property, but mind the police are informed eight thousand four hundred and thirty-two is still at large."

So far then I was relieved in mind and body, for the hateful garments were soon removed in an ante-room, and I found myself attired in a set of plain new slop clothes. Being then conducted to the governor's quarters, I was regaled with a fair supper, of which I was in sore need, and by eleven o'clock was sleeping soundly on a sofa in his sitting-room.

All thenceforth went as might have been expected. The governor was perfectly satisfied by the replies he received in the morning to his telegrams, and with many apologies I was permitted to depart. Taking an early train from Curdsmouth to Fleece, by midday I was once more back in my room at Dulworth.

I pass over the astonishment and interest which the adventure, when it became known, created amongst the natives of that out-of-the-way retreat. Nor is there any need to dwell at any length on my sensations and emotions. These were such, however, as to render it impossible for me to settle down again quietly in such solitude as I had lately been undergoing. My term of penal servitude, though short, had, in familiar parlance, rather taken it out of me, and I determined on spending the remainder of my holiday in a less retired spot. In fact, I had been unnerved again, and further solitude, I felt, under the circumstances, would only make me worse. So once more clothing myself in garments of my own, I packed up my traps, got over to Fleece in Mr. Tye's cart, and took an evening train to the lively and pleasant seaport of Westhampton. Here, I said to myself, I could still enjoy fresh air, plus the amusement to be had from the shipping, but yet minus the dressiness and fallalism of a fashionable watering-place.

But how about my lost clothes and the contents of the pockets, etc. ? Nothing whatever, as far as I could learn from Mr. Tye or others, had been seen of the scoundrel who had stolen them, and who, when dressed in them, must have looked very like me. Safe, doubtless, in his disguise, of which the blue spectacles, of course, formed no unimportant part, and with my money in his pocket, he had

had no difficulty in getting out of the way.

The gas-lit streets and bustle of Westhampton came as a most agreeable change to my urban spirit as, after dining at mine inn, I lighted a cigar (the first smoke I had had for nearly a month) and strolled forth into the summer evening.

"The moon was up, and yet it was not night," that moon whose light but twenty-four hours before had fallen upon me under such different circumstances as I traversed the beachy causeway towards Fortland! The contrast of my present situation produced a thrill of pleasure; it was all very well for the doctor to recommend solitude and quiet; I had had enough of it. Gradually I found my way down to the quays and jetties, whence were arriving or departing one or two of the last steamers plying between Westhampton and the Isle of Blank. Over against one of the piers a great commotion was going on. A small steam-packet lying there with her steam up, whistle blowing, and bell ringing, seemed to be on the point of starting upon some urgent mission.

"Where is she going?" I asked of a bystander in the loitering crowd who were watching certain passengers and porters hurrying towards the gangway.

"She's the Cape-mail's tender, sir," was the reply; "they're only waiting for the bags now, to take 'em off to the ship lying out there in the waters, where you see them four lights burning."

I loitered and watched too for awhile. In a few minutes a tramcar laden with heavy boxes and packages was run down to the tender's side, and the post-office officials commenced shifting the mails on board.

Suddenly my attention is diverted from this proceeding by the appearance of two persons pressing hurriedly through the crowd and making towards the passengers' gangway. Why, one of them is no stranger to me—it is none other than the solitary lady of Dulworth! I have caught a glimpse of her face as she passed under a strong gaslight close to me, and I am convinced it is she. My heart gives a great bound. Those wistful eyes are not to be mistaken, and as they meet mine, produce their usual effect. For a moment I am bewildered, but only for a moment, for she is no longer alone—no longer solitary. By her side is a man to whose arm she clings eagerly, desperately. Yes,

and, moreover, a man who looks like me; at least who looks as I did yesterday morning. For is not that my soft brown wideawake; is not that my light shooting-coat; and are not those my blue spectacles which he wears? By heavens, there is no mistake about it. Here is the fellow who stole my clothes—the escaped convict! The rush with which these convictions overtake me is swifter than lightning.

Involuntarily I press forward upon the heels of the pair and follow them on board the steamboat. She looks back and sees that I am doing so. Her eyes meet mine again. Their old habitual appealing expression is intensified a thousandfold by one of despairing agony which touches me to the quick.

Whispering something rapidly into her companion's ear she loosens his arm, and he glides in amongst the crowd on deck. Then she turns and faces me, as if to cover his retreat and prevent pursuit, saying as she does so, in a nervous, choking, scarcely audible voice:

"Pray forgive me. May I speak one word with you?"

I know not what answer I made, if any, but a moment later I found myself comparatively alone with her near the stern of the boat. The very words she used come back to me as I write, so indelibly are they fixed on my memory.

"I know who you are," she went on, in a tremulous whisper; "I know the outrage that you have suffered; but, oh sir, as you hope for mercy, if you have any pity left in your heart, or look for pity for any fault that you have ever done, have mercy, do not betray us. If you have a mother, sister, any one whom you love, think of her now, and think what she would suffer in my place. He is my husband, not married two years yet; he fell into a trap that was laid for him; he forged unknowingly. He is not guilty, but I cannot tell you all. It was a mistake—a trap, I say, into which he fell—take my word for it, you will be doing no wrong. For God's sake, do not give him up."

I suppose the conduct of a man with strong nerves and in robust health would have been very different to mine throughout the whole of these adventures—at least thus far, but I do not believe there would have been any difference in his behaviour from this point.

I answered:

"Madame, I say no more; I will take your word for it; I don't think I can be

deceived in you. If faces mean anything in this world, I understand yours. Tell me nothing more. I see the situation exactly, but henceforth I am blind, deaf, and dumb; have no fear."

As I uttered the last words there arose from the mingled tumult of hissing steam, clanging bell, and roaring voices, the shout of :

"Now for the shore; now for the shore—everybody for the shore."

"I must leave you," I said. "Good-bye. I can only repeat, you have nothing to fear from me."

I held out my hand. She seized it, crying :

"Oh, you are very good, very good. I can never repay you; but pray let me know to whom—to whom I am indebted. Give me your card."

"No," I whispered; "better not; I am assisting a felon, and my card, if found in your possession, might lead to trouble."

"But your clothes," she went on; "the money in your pockets? Give me an opportunity of restoring these."

"No," I repeated; "they are of no consequence. As it is, they are much at your—your husband's service. I—I have felt all along that you were in need of some help. I have been wishing for the chance of—of—"

Again there arose the shout of :

"Now for the shore; now for the shore. Any more for the shore?"

I did not finish my sentence. If she made any reply I did not hear it; I never heard her sweet voice; I never set eyes on her sweet face again; and so much the better for me.

I was jostled and hustled on to the gangway which we had been approaching, and which was withdrawn the moment I had recrossed it and left the deck of the tender.

Slowly her paddles revolved, and she steamed away to the ship in the offing. Slowly I turned on my heel and returned with a sigh to mine inn.

Nearly thirty years have passed since I

thus unintentionally, for the most part, became the means of eight thousand four hundred and thirty-two—Jollett—getting, and keeping out of the way.

That he did the latter I have every reason to believe, for only a short while ago I had the pleasure of making the acquaintance of a certain distinguished official at the Home Office, of whom I made some cautious and indirect enquiries concerning the records of escapes from our convict prisons.

This led to many strange revelations, and, curiously enough, as I brought the conversation round to Fortland, my new acquaintance told me, amongst many others, the story of how a certain convict escaped by stealing the clothes of a bather—this story in fact.

"And was he ever recaptured?" I enquired casually, and without betraying my surprise.

"No," he answered; "it was supposed there was some collusion outside, but the authorities never could get at it, and never pressed the matter after a certain time, for it was discovered in the course of six months that the man was not morally guilty, and as he could never be found, the affair passed into the mysterious shadow of the prison archives."

"It would make a good subject for a short story," said I.

"You had better use it," replied my friend, "it's quite in your line."

I have taken his hint.

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